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Sierra Life

The Magazine of the High Sierra

DECEMBER 1981 • $2.00

TONOPAH
Boomtown of the 1980's

THE SIERRA NEVADA
Is it still experiencing growing pains?

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The History, The Legends, The People

BISHOP GEM TRAILS
Where to look for gems in the High Sierra

VARISCITE:
The gemstone unique to the Sierra Nevada

SEQUOIA
The gentle giants

THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT
The story of Jack Schat, Sr.

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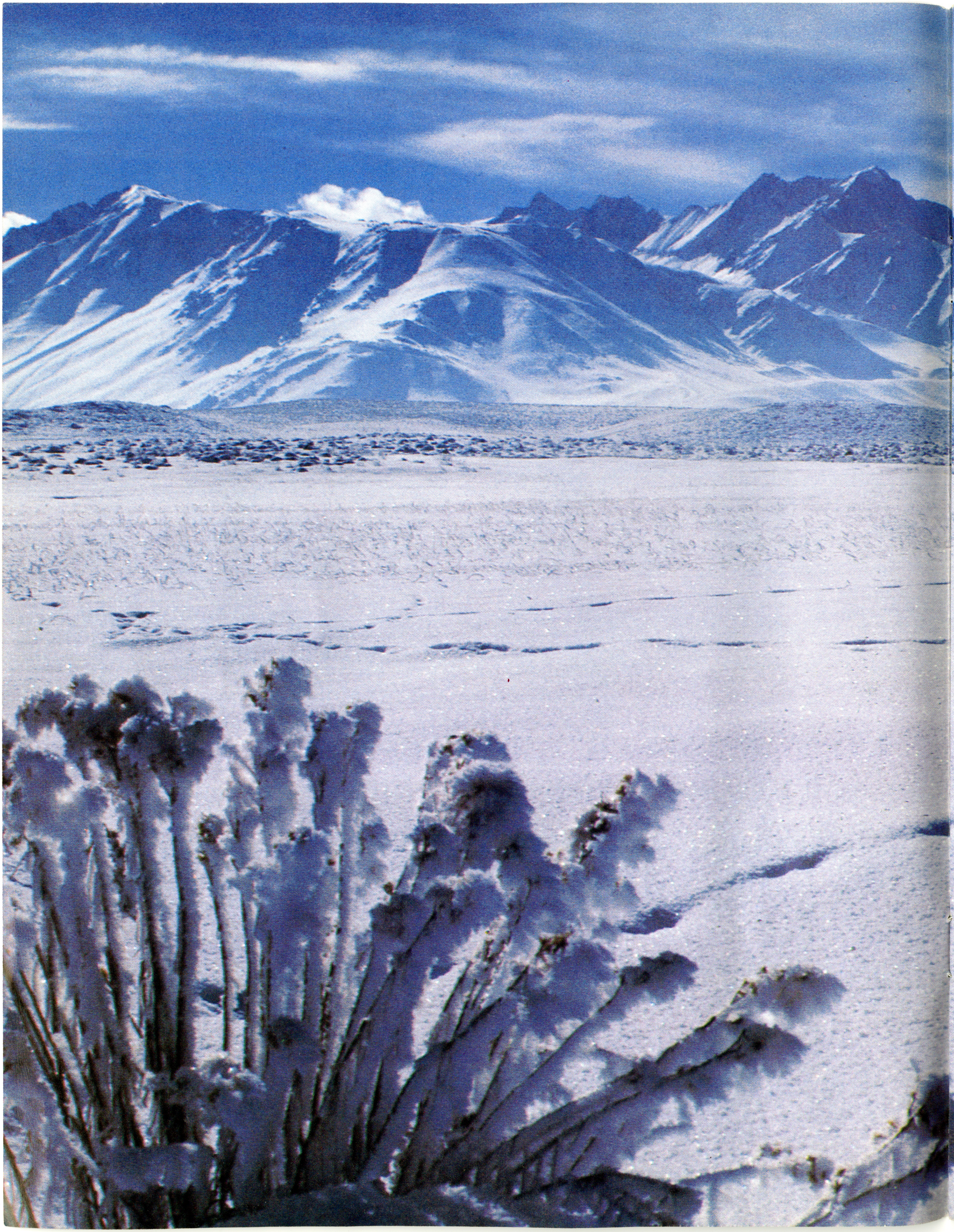

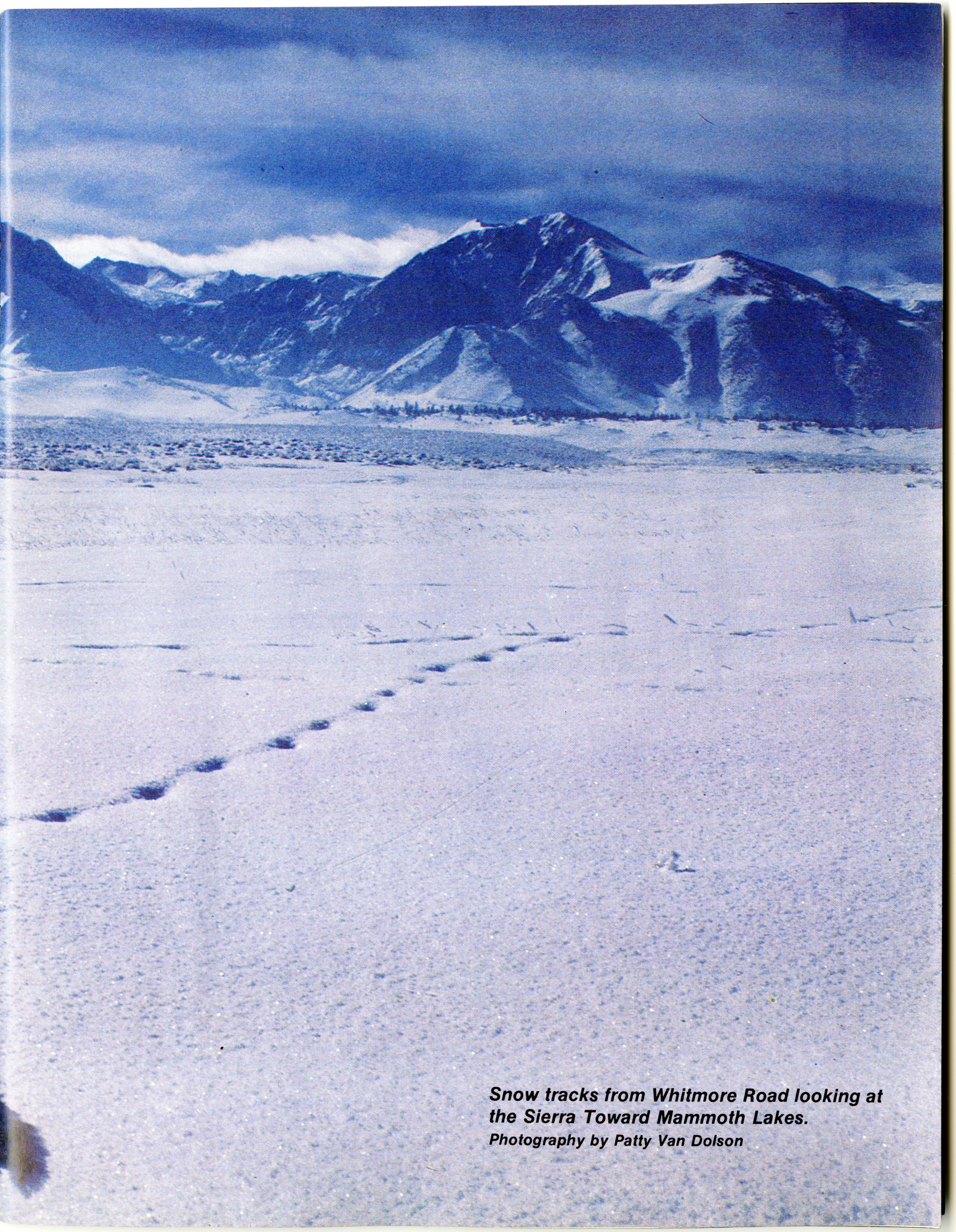

Snow tracks from Whitmore Road looking at the Sierra Toward Mammoth Lakes.

Photography by Patty Van Dolson

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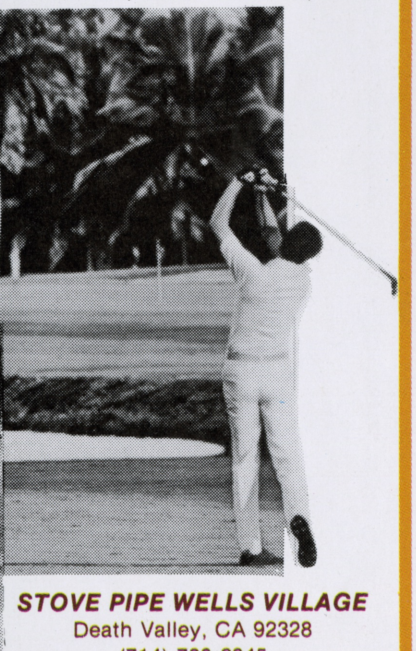

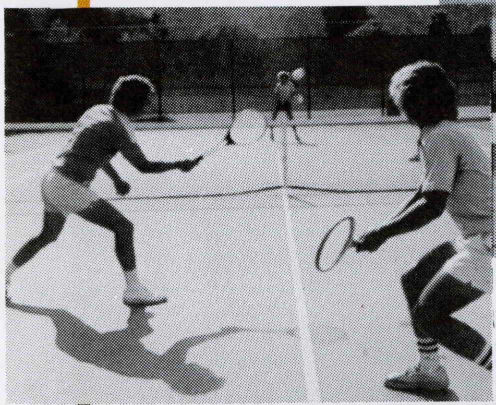

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We will feature Death Valley in our February issue — we think you'll enjoy it!

From the staff of Sierra Life and our great advertisers who make Sierra Life possible, we wish you the very happiest of holidays!

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SIERRA LIFE

The Magazine of the High Sierra

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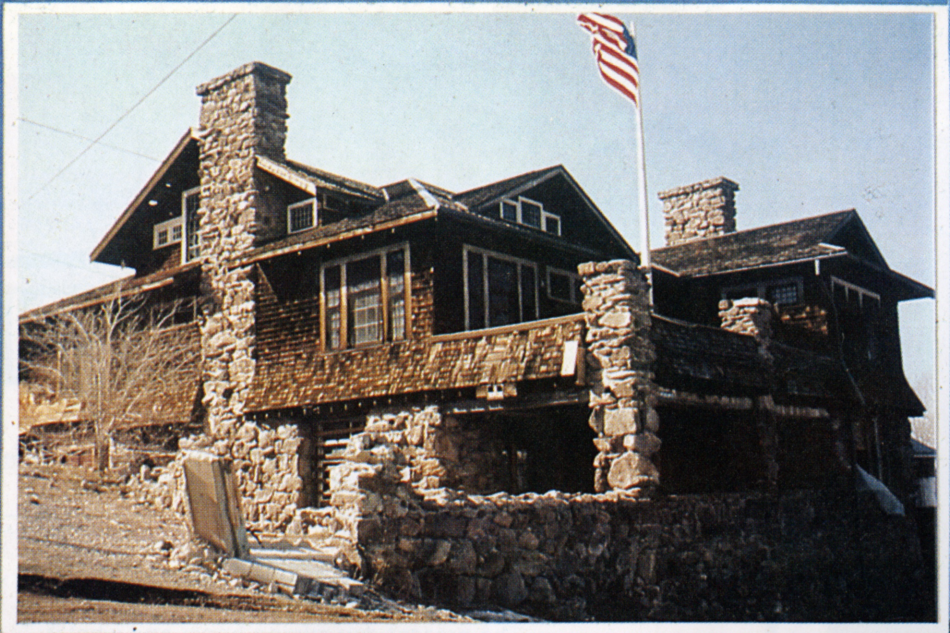
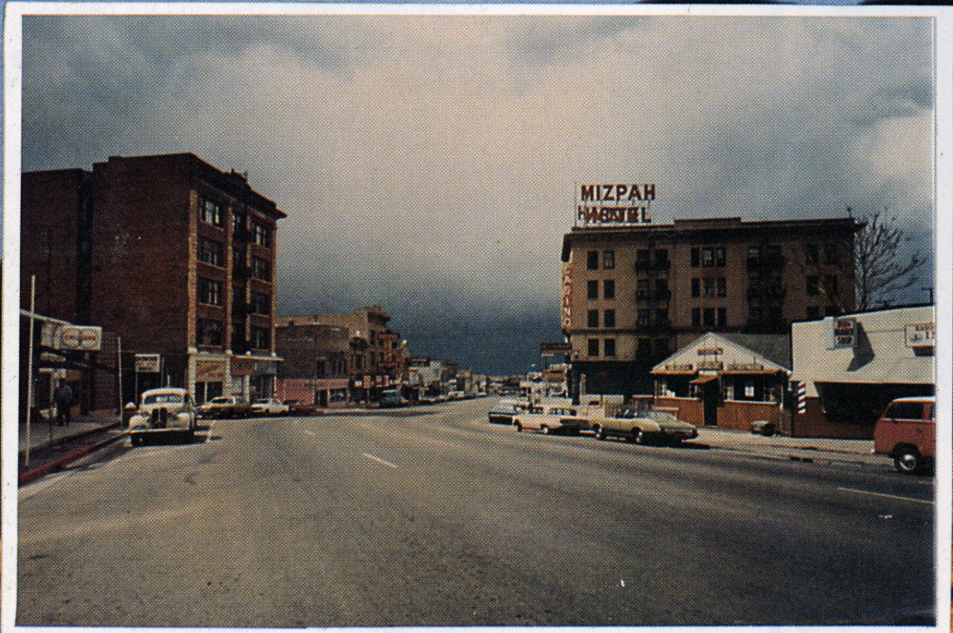
Our Cover . . .

Our Christmas by the fire scene was shot at a lodge in Sequoia National Park by Patty Van Dolson.



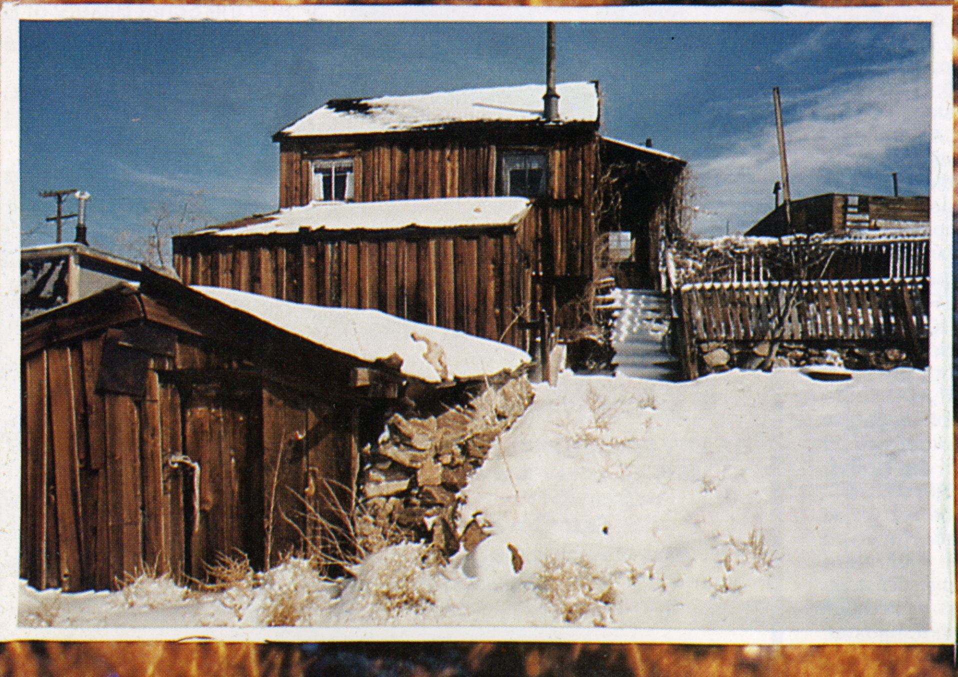
The former George Bartlett home, later the Knights of Columbus House. Built in 1905, the house is now abandoned.

Photo by Valerie J. Naso



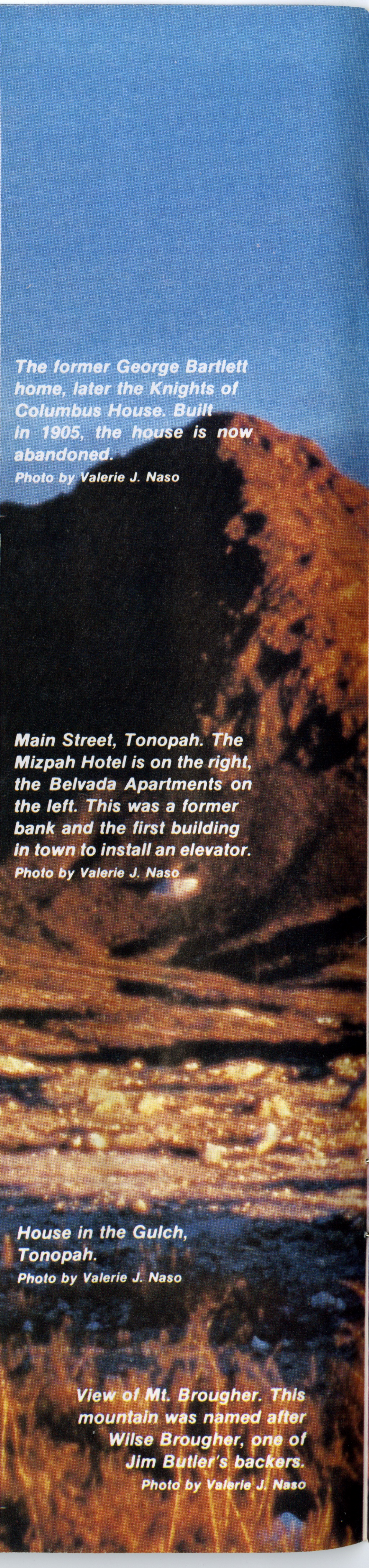
Main Street, Tonopah. The Mizpah Hotel is on the right, the Belvada Apartments on the left. This was a former bank and the first building in town to install an elevator.

Photo by Valerie J. Naso



House in the Gulch, Tonopah.

Photo by Valerie J. Naso



View of Mt. Brougher. This mountain was named after Wilse Brougher, one of Jim Butler's backers.

Photo by Valerie J. Naso

TONOPAH: long live the Queen

by
Valerie J. Naso

The present large influx of people into Tonopah is only equaled by the influx of wealth in the shape of fat smelter returns for ore shipped from the camp." This lead paragraph came from the *Tonopah Times* of November 9, 1901, but it could easily have appeared anytime in the past five years after a second boom jolted this Central Nevada town. On January 2, 1976, the *Times-Bonanaza's* prophetic headline read, "Mining Sparks Active 1975 Year in Nye County." The rush to Tonopah, "The Queen of the Silver Camps," had begun again. One of the current best selling souvenirs is a T-shirt that proclaims, "I know where the hell Tonopah is."

The sand blows, and the wind whistles around the rugged peaks of Mt. Odie and Mt. Brougher just as it did in 1900. In May of that year, Jim Butler, a rancher from Monitor Valley, left with his burro to prospect at Klondike Wells some 15 miles south of what is now Tonopah. Whether or not he really picked up that famous rock to throw at his wandering animal doesn't matter, but the fact that a closer look told him the rock

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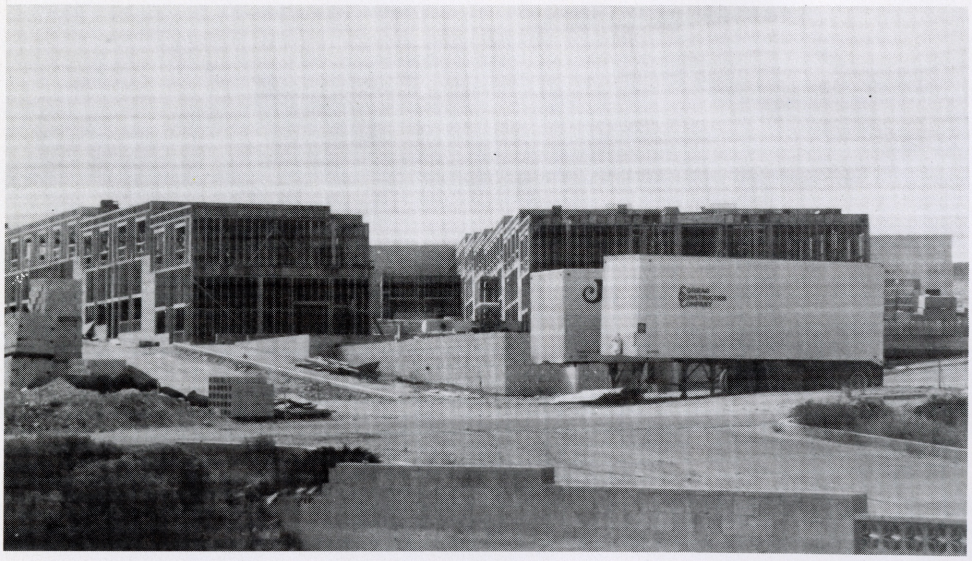

What was bare desert before is now the site of a new casino and shopping mall called Tonopah Station.

Converted bus belonging to Lynn and Dean Walker. They live inside and cook on a camp stove outside while looking for housing in Tonopah.

Partial view of the new tent city just outside the boomtown of Tonopah, Nevada.

Photography by Valerie J. Naso

Tonopah (continued)

contained silver ore changed the face of Nevada. Butler was short of money, but when he finally got the samples assayed by Walter Gayhart of Austin they were found to contain 395 ounces of silver and 15 ounces of gold per ton.

By August of that year Jim, his part Shoshone wife Belle and their backers Tasker Oddie and Wilse Brougher set up camp and staked the first claim. Belle called it "The Mizpah," a Hebrew word meaning "May the Lord watch between me and thee while we are absent one from another." Tonopah, however, is Shoshone for "spring that is covered with brush."

At 6,050 feet the country was stark with crystal air and brilliant sky and water was hard to come by. In those earliest days of the camp tents sprang up overnight as hundreds flocked to the new town. Men swarmed over the sagebrush covered hills, people arrived any way they could and saloons opened as fast as claims were staked. People were congratulating each other on every corner, showing off ore samples and practically shaking hands with themselves. There's an old story of a man who praises his claim so highly that he ends up saying, "Hell, she's too good to sell!"

The Tonopah Stage left Sodaville three days a week to carry the weary, cinder covered rail passengers from The Carson and Colorado the last 65 miles into camp, an awesome desert journey for a city person. They advertised "careful drivers and quick service" for $7.50 one way or $12.00 round trip. But when the coaches broke down from overloading, travellers were stranded until repairs were made.

The winter of 1901 was especially cold and snow banked Main Street, while an epidemic of pneumonia swept through the tents and makeshift cabins,

Continued on next page

TONOPAH Continued

claiming 50 lives. San Francisco newspapers ran articles to the effect that people were abandoning the town, even on foot in the snow to escape the scourge. The Times replied fiercely that Tonopah could take care of her own, and suggested that if they needed any help in burying their dead the town would raise a fund for such a purpose and advise San Francisco to send its bravest men for the task.

They were tough and spirited and those who lasted the winter began what was called an unprecendented building boom in the spring of 1902. As fast as the teams unloaded the lumber at the yard, other teams hauled it away up the steep slopes of the new town. Homes ranged from the modest to the lavish. The stone castle stands occupied by the Pillers family on the farthest point overlooking Ralston Valley. It has a history of ghost and strange happenings. The three story brown shingle house below it was built by George Bartlett for his wife and was the scene of balls and oyster banquets before he lost his money. Now it stands in quiet ruin.

The late Charlie Joseph, son of a Mormon preacher, came to Nevada from Utah with his family in five covered wagons. The journey lasted two weeks. "We got to Austin on a Friday night and Dad camped at the lumber yard," Charlie remembered. "I guess we were pretty much of a curiosity because all the kids came up to the gate to have a look. Dad asked them what they wanted and one fellow said he'd heard Mormons had horns and he wanted to see 'em. Dad told him that we were like deer and the horns had dropped off for the season, there was nothing to see."

Charlie arrived in Tonopah in 1906 and washed dishes for 30 men in a boarding house for a dollar a day. Like others who came to town

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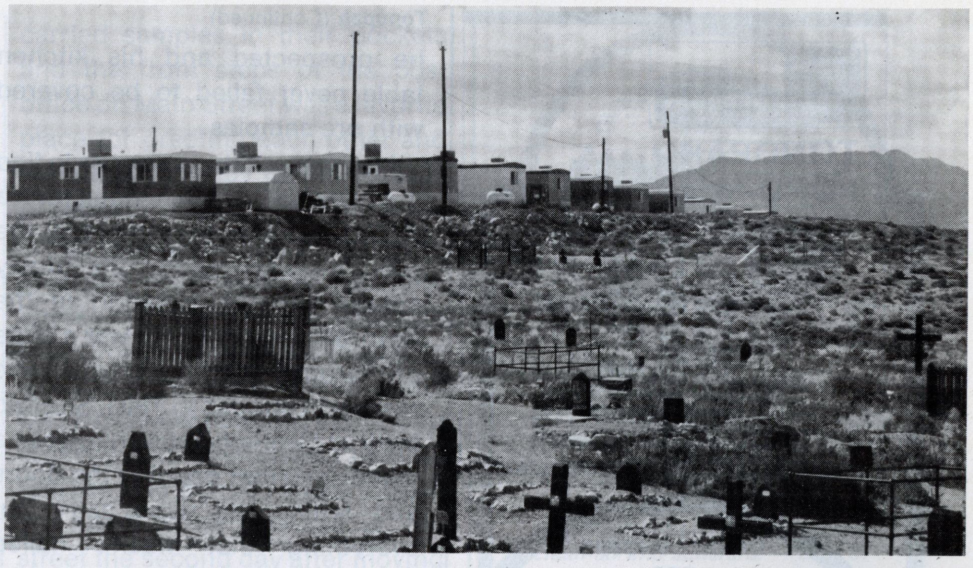
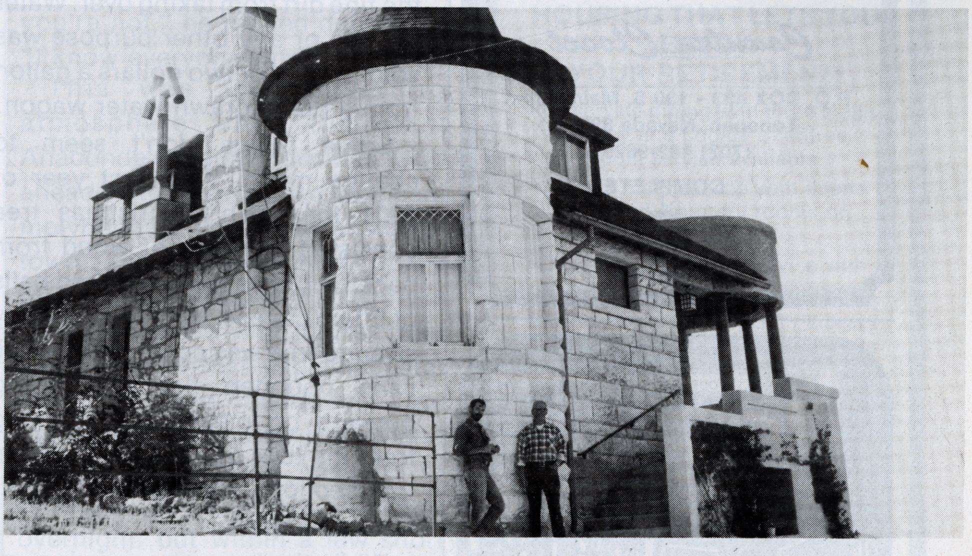


Mobile homes stretch across the hill over Tonopah's first cemetery where seventeen men, killed in the 1911 Belmont fire, are buried.



Tonopah's castle house with owner and long-time resident, Ralph Pillers on the right. On the left is his son Joel.

Photography by Valerie J. Naso

Headframes like this one dot the hillsides of Tonopah.

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Tonopah (Continued)

he prospected and his kitchen table never failed to be covered with ore samples.

Men weren't the only ones to find their way to Tonopah, but it took a strong woman to withstand the ever blowing sand, the dusty streets and the isolation of the town. Mrs. Hugh Brown was a bride of 19 from San Francisco when she reached Tonopah in 1904. She told me that cleaning house had been a matter of either opening the doors and letting the wind carry out everything that wasn't nailed down, or keeping water soaked burlap bags on the floor to keep the fine dirt from taking over. Water for this or any other purpose was sold for one or two dollars a gallon from a horse drawn water wagon.

Some things don't seem to change much. That first year of 1901 the town's Christmas tree consisted of strips of wood from packing crates hung with red balls of Edam cheese. In 1973 a similarly strange tree was constructed of oil cans pounded flat and strung outward on pieces of wire hung from the tops of a pole at the main intersection. Nevertheless, it was the same spirit.

While the town was growing - as early as 1902 there were 3,000 people and 32 saloons in camp - mining activity was furious. Everyone was involved, but the Tonopah Mining Company was the biggest and it controlled the two things most important to the town; water and the new railroad. When every mine whistle blew a salute on the afternoon of July 24, 1904, everyone knew that the long awaited track that had cost one million dollars was completed. Imagine, if you can, the excitement of being connected with the outside world for the first time.

Tonopah always loved a parade, and the coming of the railroad was the beginning of a celebration that started early on the morning of July 25th to the strains of The Carson Band marching up from the new depot. It continued for three days. Everyone participated, a golden spike was driven, there was dancing in Main Street, horses raced and speeches were made. This may have been the first parade that had a burro with the slogan "Me and Jim Found Tonopah," a staple of the much later annual Jim Butler Days Celebration. The classic line was first dreamed up for a cartoon in the old Tonopah Sun by Arthur Buel.

By 1908 Tonopah had attained about as much respectable stability as a mining camp could hope for. Because it was a 20th century camp it lacked the colorful newspaper and quaint architecture of Virginia City, but this did not stop it from opening a really fine hotel, the Mizpah, on the spot where the Butlers had first camped. Tonopah had suffered the previous year when money from the West Coast had tightened after the San Francisco earthquake. Three banks had closed and things had looked bleak. The Mizpah Hotel was to be a symbol of renewed confidence, a sign of stability for the town. It would provide a touch of elegance in the vast expanse of arid desert. It had five floors and an electric elevator, and the grand opening ceremonies were held on November 17, 1908 with half the population in attendance.

Another grand opening was held in the spring of 1980 after the hotel had gone through a period of assorted owners and terrible neglect. A staggering sum was spent to completely restore the Mizpah to its former grandeur, and probably far beyond, and its elegance today is unsurpassed. The furnishings are turn of the century and Oddie himself would have approved of dinner in the Jack Dempsey Room. It comes as a

Continued on next page

Tonopah (Continued)

surprise in a town that is still in the middle of nowhere.

Mining was ceaseless, headframes dotted the hillsides and the mines operated 24 hours a day. It was sometime in the early hours of February 17, 1911 that a miner set his candle on a timber and forgot it, starting what was one of the most disastrous fires in Tonopah. Smoke poured from the shaft, the words "Fire in the Belmont!" passed swiftly through town and when it was finally over there were 17 men to be buried during a driving storm in the town's first cemetery at the end of Main Street.

Life in early Tonopah was not all hardship and the people either made their own entertainment or enjoyed what might come to town. The Big Casino in the red light district was the center of activity for miners and dance hall girls, while more respectable entertainment could be found up the street at the Butler Theater across from the Mizpah. Plays alternated with musical reviews and silent movies that one reviewer called "splendid pictures." The music that was heard in the desert night could have come from a miner's fiddle or a piano that had been hauled in by 20 mule team.

When the Nevada State Council on the Arts met in Tonopah in 1973 they were to find the same spirit; it took Beverly Pillers a scant half hour to locate and bring to the Convention Center an old prospector who played a very fine fiddle, much to the surprise of a few city people.

Tonopah continued to do well until 1920 when the expiration of the Pittman Silver Act and a lack of good ore closed the Belmont Mill. Mining struggled on, but the grand wild days were gone and so were a lot of the people. The town became quiet and the old timers continued to dream of another bonanza as they prospected the hills. They all carried samples in their pockets and the front steps of the post office on Main Street was a favorite place for greeting each other and comparing grubby looking pieces of rock.

The population gradually shrank to about 1,500 people, everyone knew who lived where, what car they drove and when they went "to town" for the mail. Mizpah Andy was a gray bearded old gentleman in a red flannel shirt who greeted tourists and pointed them toward the hotel. When I walked up the street the second day after moving to town he asked me where I was from, "Tonopah," I said. "No, you're not," he replied definitely. "I know everyone who lives here."

This was the prevailing atmosphere when the giant Anaconda Company decided to go ahead with a proposed open pit molybdenum mine just outside of town. There were pictures in the paper of company officials shakings hands with locals, front page articles that explained that moly is used mainly in the manufacture of alloy steels, and Tonopah gradually began to change. It did not happen overnight, but within a few short years nothing was the same and it may never be again. Tonopah is as much of a boomtown now as it was in 1902.

It is strange to watch a town change so much. During the first boom there was nothing to alter, only bare desert to build on, but this time the face of town has been changed forever. In the process a lot of the charm of one of the last frontiers has been lost. However, there is an excitement and a vitality in the air that has not been felt for 70 years. The Tonopah Club is gone, the Silver Dollar Hotel and the Passtime Club have been burned out, the railroad depot burned to the ground. But to stand on Main Street and watch an entire

Continued on Page 12

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Tonopah (Continued)

block being rebuilt as fast as the lumber can be put up is to understand what the excited reporter of 1902 meant when he wrote that "there is hardly a scanting left in the lumber yards."

There are few casual observers in town and people are either old Tonopah or rank newcomers. Mixing these elements is not easy on either side. The people who lived in Tonopah before the new boom did so because it was the last frontier, a place where people could do what they wanted, be eccentric if they chose, and live by their own rules. Beverly and Ralph Pillers have lived in the stone castle for a number of years and raised five children there. "When the old timers meet in the grocery store they grab hold of each other and say, 'God, I'm glad you're still alive," Ralph said. "The last head count at the school was 400 and some. This year, it's 830 and Anaconda had to build a school - They're bussing the kids now." The lights that used to stop abruptly at the edge of town seem to stretch on forever below the Pillers' dining room window.

Beverly misses the local color, the characters that made Tonopah unique. "There may be a few left, it's just that you can't find them anymore," she said wistfully.

Sharon and Bob Bottom have spent a long time in Tonopah, but they're worried. "We don't even go out anymore, not even Bobby, there's too many wierdos around," Sharon said. "Bobby tells me, 'don't go out of the house after dark. Lock the doors, pull the shades and stay in the house.' We've always got another murder here. As long as I'm in the house I don't worry too much." But Sharon admits that some of the new people are nice.

For the first time Tonopah will have a casino, a shopping mall and a supermarket. Tonopah Station is a mind boggling pile of lumber at the southern edge of town. Until this year shopping has been done at two small local markets or on a 250 mile round trip to Bishop, the nearest town. "It has helped us local people too because we've really needed a big supermarket," Sharon agreed. If that is not enough, the equivalent of the Tonopah Stage is Pacific Mountain Air Lines with three day a week service from Tonopah to Las Vegas for $53.00 one way.

Still, there are problems. "What they neglect to tell over the news is that there's no place to live. People uproot their families, come out here and then they find there's no housing," Sharon said.

It is remarkable to see a real tent city spring up outside of town, but that is what has happened. While Anaconda and others have built or brought in trailers for their employees, there is no place for camp followers to go. Ralph Pillers pointed out that it takes roughly three non-mining people to one to keep the town going. A regular community of converted busses, trailers and tents is the first thing to be seen approaching Tonopah from the west. The people are nice, most of them are young, and they have no conception of what it means to winter in Tonopah in a tent.

Lynn and Dean Walker are living in a bright yellow bus with an orange stripe and a chimney poking out of the roof. They came to Tonopah from North Carolina with their three small sons and they stay because wages are good. "You can't find a place to live here. We looked at a duplex today, but the guy wants outrageous rent - it's $300.00 a month," Lynn said. A few short years ago a two bedroom house rented for $70.00 a month.

"This metal bus is just like you're in an ice box. We build a fire in the

Continued on next page

Tonopah (Continued)

stove back there, but we can't make too big a one 'cause of the clothes." Lynn expressed the same concerns Sharon Bottom might feel. "We don't really want to raise the boys in a big city - you know, drugs and stuff. But maybe things are the same everywhere."

Friends had warned me to stay away from this encampment, but I found the people to be warm and hospitable. Roxanne Magnus and Darrell McCurdy also live in a converted bus that is furnished in a cozy manner with books and curtains and a sofa. Next to it they have pitched an eye catching Indian teepee. Darrell is there because he's a mechanic and the work never stops coming. Will they stay? "Maybe not if it gets real cold," Roxanne said.

The other half is living in brand new houses, some still being built, and the cost of these goes up to $300,000 or more. They are clustered on the steep sides of both mountains, although most of them are on the more desirable Mt. Oddie side of town.

There are a lot of new stores, a pizza parlor, a nutrition center and clothing stores, but the cost of everything is high because Tonopah is still isolated. I asked Beverly if the clothing store was typical of Tonopah. "No," she said. "Is that good or bad?" "It's good." The good will take time to be appreciated.

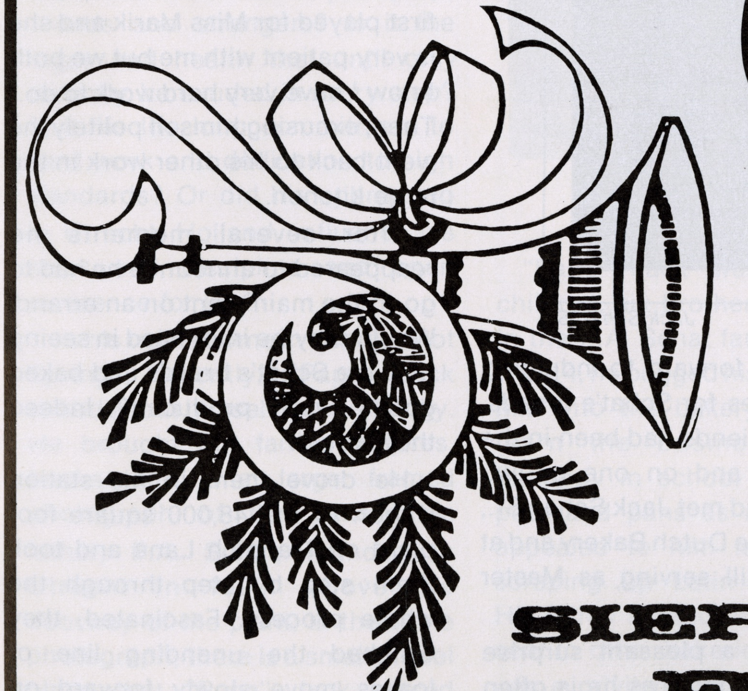
The first thing almost everyone says is that the town's gone crazy. The next thing a lot of the old timers say is that they're moving. Where to? Manhattan, a tiny community to the north in Big Smokey Valley, a place that only recently got TV reception.

Mrs. Ray Downs, Sr. expressed it very well. "You go to town and you have to pick out the people you know. Used to be you just waved at everybody. People have to see it to believe it. My brother is coming out next week and he was here when it was nothing. People hear about boom towns, but you just can't explain it."

Motels are going up as fast as saloons were in 1902, but if you want to see for yourself you'd better make a reservation because the no vacancy signs are usually out.

There were people trudging into town with clothes over one arm and a suitcase in hand. They come by bus, they sleep in cars, anybody's car. Friday and Saturday nights pack the Mizpah Casino until there is barely standing room. Said one woman, shouting to make herself heard, "I don't like too much noise, that's why I like a small town and that's why I want it to stay that way."

It's too late for that and the residents are going to have a rough ride. Maybe if everyone relaxes a little some of the excitement will get to them in spite of themselves.



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THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

The story of Jack Schat, Sr.

Jack Schat, Sr.

by Terry E. Brengle

On a spring day in 1981, two friends sat together in Schat's Dutch Bakery Restaurant in Bishop, California, discussing the pros and cons of leaving their homes in San Diego to move up to the Bishop or Owens Valley region. They had chosen this particular restaurant in the Eastern Sierra town for its unusual and authentic Dutch design and because they both looked forward to indulging their appetites for Schat's breads. One of the friends had been in the area before and on one or two occasions had met Jack Schat, Sr., founder of the Dutch Bakery and at that time, still serving as Master Baker.

So it was a pleasant surprise when "Papa" Jack, as he is often called, a strikingly handsome man in his late 70's, unexpectedly brought them tea and some Dutch chocolate cookies and joined them at their table.

After some amiable conversation he suddenly asked in his soft Netherlands accent if they would like to hear him play a "piece" he was studying with Iren Marik (a concert pianist in Independence, CA, who gives concerts and private lessons in her home). They naturally said yes. He went over to the piano in the south end of the restaurant and ran through portions of Beethoven's Pathetique Sonata by heart. The two friends were entranced and applauded when he was done. He smiled at them and said, "I studied that piece for years and still I don't play it so well. It's the same piece I first played for Miss Marik and she is very patient with me but we both know I have very hard work to do." Then, excusing himself politely, he went back to his other work in the large kitchen.

After several moments he reappeared to announce he had to go to the main plant on an errand. Would they be interested in seeing how the Schat's breads and baked goods were produced? Indeed they would.

He drove them in his station wagon to the 48,000 square foot plant on Mandich Lane and took them step by step through the whole process. Fascinated, they watched the unending line of loaves move slowly forward on long conveyer belts through specially designed ovens to

Continued on next page

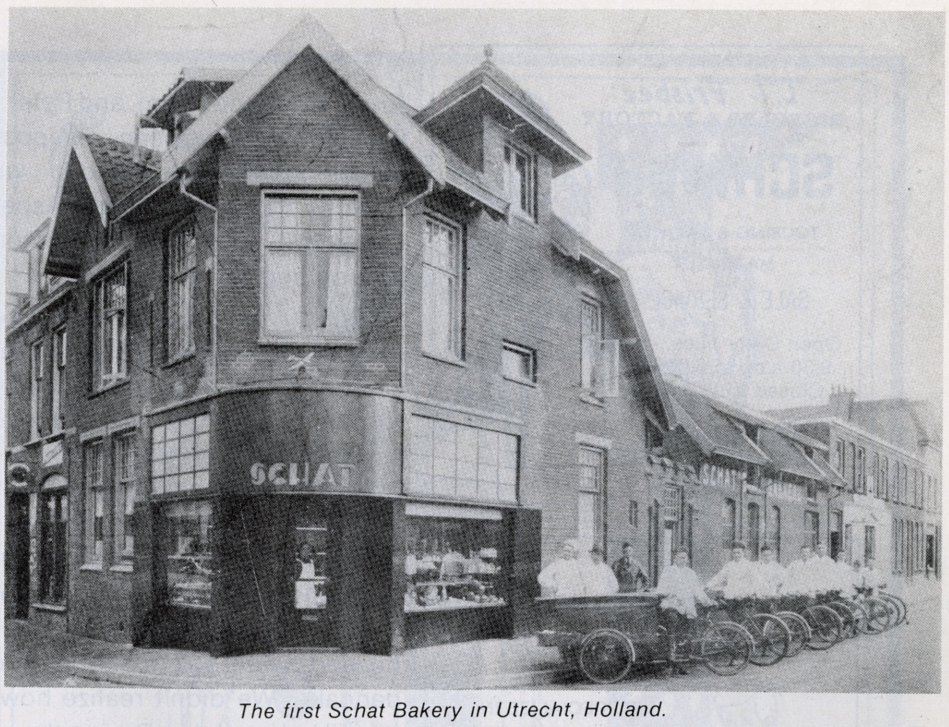
overhead cooling belts and finally to the wrapping room where the bread was sliced, then sealed in plastic wraps. Outside, large trucks stood ready to be loaded before making their rush delivery to various supermarket warehouses which, in turn, distribute the products to as many as 1,731 outlets throughout California, Nevada and Arizona.

The tour took 20 minutes but the plant stays open day and night, to fill the consumers demands for the specialty breads, rolls and baked goods.

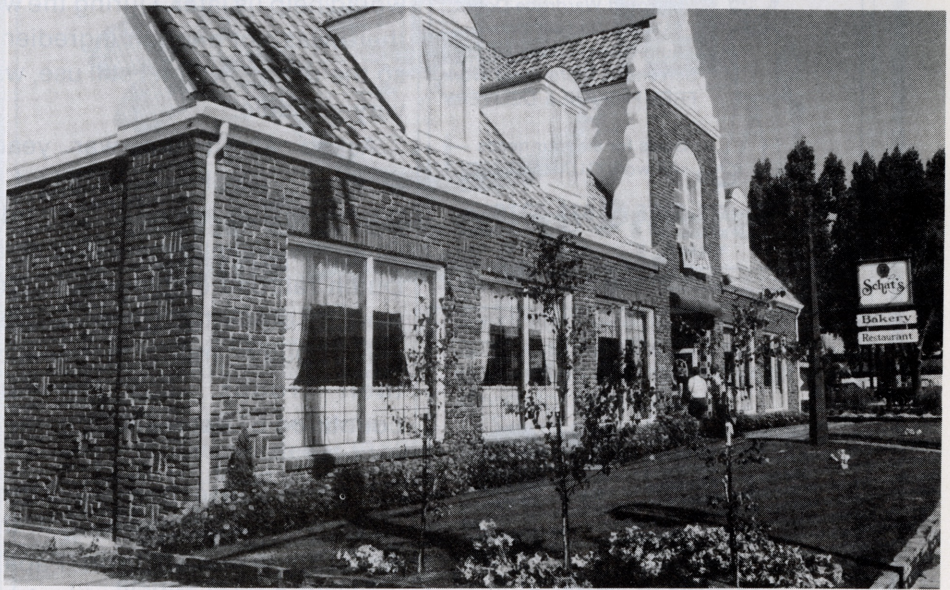
Outside, on their separate ways again (each later did decide to move to the area) one of the friends, not often given to hyperbole, said, "What an amazing man. If I could bottle his charm, I'd make a fortune. I'd call it Essence of Schat."

What is the essence of Jack Schat, Sr.? What is it that so conspicuously elevates him above and separates him from the average person today? Is it the oldworld courtesy and the impeccable manners he extends to friends and strangers? Is it the vigor and health that until only recently he exuded in every step? Is it his life long commitment to hard work and dedication to high standards? Or did his upbringing in Utrecht, Holland, influence his strict self discipline and open reverence for life?

In his trailer home in Keough Hot Springs, recently, "Papa" Jack talked about himself and his family. He brought out family pictures, books and one large framed photograph of the bakery his father, P.A. Schat, founded in Utrecht in 1890. Above the doorway of the plant, in the same photograph, there is a small model plane that "Papa" Jack placed there in honor of one of his brothers who was a pilot and an inventor.



The first Schat Bakery in Utrecht, Holland.



The recently completed Schat Bakery building located on North Main Street in Bishop, California.

"Papa" Jack was one of 10 children, six brothers, four sisters in the P.A. Schat family. When he was 14, he begged his father to take him into the bakery and let him learn the business. He was unhappy in school and scraping pots and pans as an apprentice appealed to him far more than scraping up Latin conjugations. His father agreed. In time, he was sent to other bakeries to study. "It was a privilege, in those days, to learn. There was no pay, only food and board."

Fourteen years after he apprenticed to his father, he bought out the bakery and his father retired. It was 1931. The Depression years. At that time, 25 cents bought two loaves of bread.

In spite of the hard times, he married a year later and he and his young bride Kine (pronounced Keenah) struggled together to keep the bakery going. To save money, they took in some of their help as boarders. And again, in spite of the uncertain times, they started a family producing, eventually, four sons: Jack Jr.,

Continued on next page

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JACK SCHAT Continued

Erick, Adrianne (Dan), and Peter (a well known European composer whose opera on Houdini was recently performed in Aspen, Colorado) and two daughters, Marion and Alida.

"Papa" Jack and Kine worked inseparably at the bakery while a "nanny-cook" took responsibility for the children. Times improved economically in the few years before the outbreak of World War II and the German invasion of Holland. They invented and developed a special pancake flour which "Papa" Jack recalled, "only needed water to make a good pancake. We didn't realize how it would help us later. During the war there was not enough ingredients so the recipe, which I still use, was very valuable."

Asked about the war years, "Papa" Jack recounted a particularly intense episode. Queen Wilhelmina had ordered all Dutch railroad employees to stop working since the Germans were using Dutch trains to transport their troops. The Germans countered by decreeing: no trains, no food.

With counterfeit travelling papers that students living in the Schat home printed up on "Papa's" own small press, he went by truck to Northern Holland to buy potatoes and any other foodstuff the farmers could sell and brought them back to the Underground. On one occasion, which turned out to be his final run, a young German officer approached him with an offer. The German had a girl with him and he told "Papa" Jack that if he would give them a ride in his truck to Utrecht he would be guaranteed safe passage across the Zwolle bridge at the De Ysel river which the Germans controlled. Since the Germans were notorious for stealing from the Dutch trying to cross the river, "Papa" Jack agreed.

Along the way, "Papa" Jack discovered that the German officer had "transferred" a bottle of oil and some bacon from "Papa" Jack's luggage to his own. Furious, but unable to say anything, he drove toward the Zwolle bridge. It was a smooth crossing as promised, but when they reached the other side, an English pilot, mistaking the truck for German, began firing on it. There was a wild exodus to the nearest fox holes. During a lull "Papa" Jack thought, "Ah, this is my chance," and he ran back to his truck to exchange potatoes for the oil and bacon in the officer's pack. "I put my life on the line for a piece of bacon and some oil," he said, "and I later paid for it dearly."

For when he got back to the bakery he found it surrounded by the Gestapo. The German officer had betrayed him. He was taken to prison. "They locked me up," he said, "and I thought: that's the end. The next day I was taken to the what do you call that - the place of interrogation and they questioned me. I was very scared. So afraid. I never told so many lies in my life. But they let me go."

He joined the Underground. There was no turning back or working at the bakery for the remainder of the war. However, toward the war's end he was rewarded when Canadian troops dropped food supplies 20 miles outside of Utrecht and he was allowed to load the trucks and bring back the supplies to the people. "never heard so much cheering in the streets in my life. We were heroes. They knew we were bringing them food."

After the war, the Schats watched with growing apprehension the Russian encroachment on European countries. Convinced that Holland was also threatened, they decided to leave. In 1947, "Papa" Jack and Kine

Continued on next page

JACK SCHAT Continued

arrived in Cerritos where Kine's brother operated a large dairy. He bought "Papa" Jack some property in Artesia, a Dutch community, and encouraged him to plan opening a much needed bakery. "Papa" Jack and Kine flew back to Holland to make the necessary arrangements, returning in 1948 to start the bakery and, he thought, a new life. But a phone call from Holland brought the discouraging news that his brothers and their wives had changed their minds about emigrating to the United States. Nine months later, the U.S. Immigration Office notified "Papa" Jack that his time was up in the country. He could no longer remain; he must leave at once. "I went back to Holland but I lost the bakery. You can't run a bakery from 6,000 miles away."

Dreams die hard in the Schat family. In 1957, the whole family returned to California under the sponsorship of Jack Schat, Jr., who had come to America in 1950 and had joined the U.S. Army Tank Corps.

With no job and $2,000 to their name, the 53 year old "Papa" Jack settled his wife, his sons Erick and Dan (Peter remained in Holland), his daughter Marion (Alida followed later with her husband) in a rented house in Los Angeles. He bought a car. Then two weeks before Christmas he was hired as a temporary worker in a bakery.

When he was down to exactly $300, the welcome news came that there was an opening for a baker in Bishop. Once more, the trek with his family to rent a house, to begin again. He went to work for the Keough Sheepherders Bread Bakery as the Senior Pastry Baker, and his son, Jack Jr. worked as the bread maker. "At first we liked it. No telephone, no employees, no trouble. And then my wife said: why don't we start again? Our own bakery."

Continued on next page

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JACK SCHAT Continued

To open their own bakery and rent a building on Main Street, "Papa" Jack needed $15,000. With a strong reference from the Bank of Netherlands praising his honesty and his good business sense, he went to the Bank of America to ask for a loan. They turned him down. They weren't interested. (Ironically, years later, the very same bank approved a quarter of a million dollar loan for the Schats' new plant on Mandich Lane).

Disappointed but not discouraged, "Papa" Jack called an old friend, Wout Koning, a Dutch dairyman in Southern California who, when he heard what was needed, offered the amount at once. "Can you believe it? With no collateral, nothing except my hands, this man believed in me and in my work without question."

It's a familiar saga in the "American Dream" tradition. The whole family went to work in the small and ill-equipped bakery. Sons Erick and Dan came to work before and after school. Jack Jr. baked the original Sheepherders Bread to which the Schats acquired the rights while "Papa" Jack turned out the pastries. Perhaps the hardest worker was Kine. It was her idea to keep the bakery open all night on Fridays, the first store to do so, so the miners and campers coming out of the desert could get hot chocolate, doughnuts and cakes at any hour. It meant long and hard hours for her and she often walked home alone at dawn, desperately tired. Although they are now divorced, "Papa" Jack gives Kine full credit for her part in the family business. "She did a marvelous job. You can't have a success without a wife who knows your language and is determined to give 100 percent. That's what she did. She earns that."

As the Schat products became more and more popular, it soon

Continued on next page

became clear that the Main Street Bakery could no longer keep up with the demands. In 1969, the Schats built the large baking plant on Mandich Lane. They equipped it piece by piece with operating machines largely purchased from other or bankrupt bakeries. To continue producing hearth baked breads rather than breads baked in pans, they added the expensive Helms oven. The breads are natural grain (a quarter of a million pounds of flour is used during one week's operation) and no preservatives are used. It was this strict adherence to high quality standards, plus innovative distribution methods and nose-to-the-grindstone committment that contributed to the enrichment of the family business.

At age 65, with the business prospering and steadily growing, "Papa" Jack looked forward to retiring. He flew to Holland on a long vacation. In his absence, however, his sons had built a new bakery on Main Street (to which they added the restaurant in 1980) and on his return, they urged him to take up his work as Master Baker again. Far from retiring, he plunged in with more enthusiasm than before. "I was very happy to do it," he said, "I brought back a special recipe from my brother Do, in Utrecht, for Volkoren bread so I developed that and some new Dutch pastries. Yes, I was very happy. I enjoy myself in my work."

It is also a familiar saga, and not exclusive to the "American Dream", that an occasional successful family enterprise develops signs of blight. TV series have been produced on the subject. John Steinbeck's novel, East of Eden, is a classic example. Shakespeare immortalized the dilemma in King Lear.

It took an accident to slow down "Papa" Jack. He shattered his ankle and was laid up for several weeks. In the hospital, he decided the time had come to withdraw from the presidency, to turn the reins over to his sons Erick and Dan. He wanted to continue to bake pastries and relinquish the responsibilities of running the firm. He had put 61 years of his life into mastering his baking skills and he trusted his sons to run the business.

But the sons were divided. Little by little, internal squabbling began. There were heated exchanges. Charges and counter charges were levied. Rumours spread that the business was shaky, that the quality of products was deteriorating. Employees were disgruntled and there was a strike. Again, there were charges of and improprieties.

Through it all, "Papa" Jack, now devoid of management voice, could only stand by and watch the "house divided" split further and further apart. He immersed himself in what he does best, his Master Baking.

Then, in April, 1981, the man who started with $300 in his pocket to build the second largest payroll in Inyo County was fired. In a letter, he was requested to take a "leave of absence" with four weeks pay. It was as ignominious ending to a lifetime career.

The future of Schat's Dutch Bakery clearly lies in how the current management resolves its difficulties. There are indications that the prospects look good, that new accords will be reached and that "'Papa" Jack can perhaps look forward to taking up his craft as before. But until that time, the days are long for the man who started the dream. He spends them mostly in his trailer. He still manages a daily swim at the Keough Hot Springs pool but the bounce in his walk is not as evident as before.

He looks at his piano, his music open at the Pathetique Sonata but he doesn't practice. His head, he says, hurts too much to concentrate. He has recently developed severe and unrelenting headaches.

A suggestion that he leave the negotiations to his sons, that he get away for a while, perhaps to Holland, only brings a sad smile to his face. "No," he says, quietly but firmly, "I stay here. This is my life and I see it through to the end."

It comes as no surprise. Because, ultimately, this is the essence of the man. Essence of "Papa" Jack.

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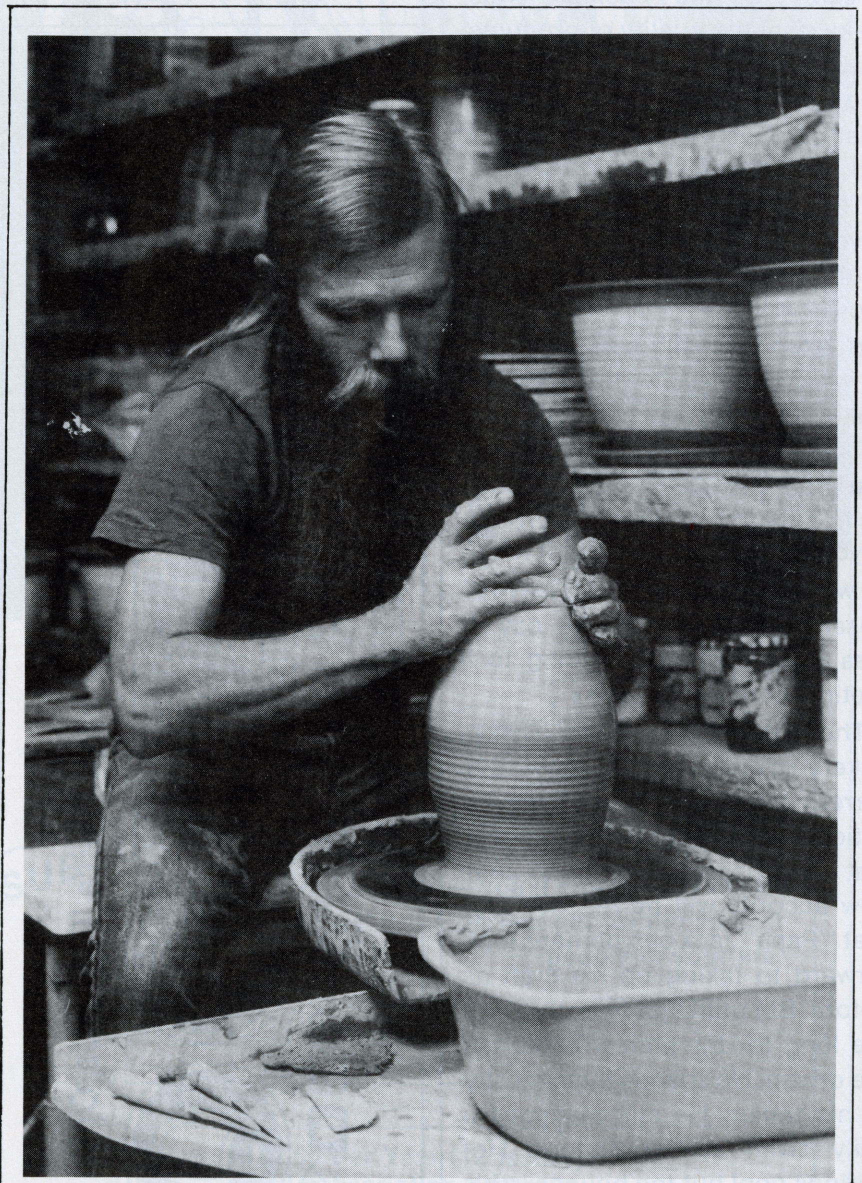

Photo by Tom Ross

Drew Wickman working at his potter's wheel.

by
Jane Fisher

Out of the canyons of that magnificent rock pile called the Sierra Nevada Range pour the alluvial fans of the Pleistocene glaciers, beckoning and giving access to the fearsome beauty of the backcountry. Half a day's drive east begin the fawns and golds of the enormous southwestern deserts. Life at the foot of the fan and the top of the desert attracts artist and artisan to the clear, quiet atmosphere of pure creation.

"I consider myself really lucky to be able to practice my art at my own pace," says Drew Wickman, entrepreneur of The Independence Pottery. "My long range goal has been to establish a business doing the kind of thing I want to do."

You will have to find Drew. He doesn't travel a business route to sell a mass produced product any more. His shop is tiny, filled with the busyness of making pots and being joyously friendly. Buckets dripping with clay, a dart board, impromptu shelving of rough boards and apple crates, a faded Persian rug on half of the floor, a cactus plant and a Tiffany lamp, workbenches full of works in

Continued on next page

DREW WICKMAN Continued

progress, and some bright kites hanging in the front window reflect the absolute chaos of true peace.

Wickman is slight, fair and bearded, and wears the standard costume of the sixties college grad: tee shirt, faded jeans and a gold earring. A pair of debonair teenagers he scarcely looks old enough to have fathered saunter through with friends who also call him "Dad", grabbing a snack on the way out the back door that stands open to sunlight and a big homemade kiln.

"I first wanted to be a painter," Wickman says, "but when I got involved in clay I really got excited. It's tactile, it's earth, it has a form you can put your hands on. I was in school at the time when abstract expressionism was very popular. Clay is so adaptable to expression — form, color, shape, twist and turn. We believed in truth to materials. Clay should look like clay and stone should look like stone." His green eyes spark with enthusiasm and out from behind the facade of disheveled potter emerges the literate artist.

"I consider myself to be an artist potter. I work in vessel forms but consider myself a sculpter. I am a potter because of the forms I work in."

Wickman earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, while married and helping to support a family. He did picture framing in an art supply store. "Unfortunately, there is not a lot you can do with a B.F.A.," he says, "but I wanted to start working, rather than get my M.A. I went back to school to get my teaching certificate in primary education. I like working with kids, but when I did my student teaching, I realized so much of it involved things I didn't want to do: the role, the business and all that. I knew what I really wanted was to make pots, so I went into business

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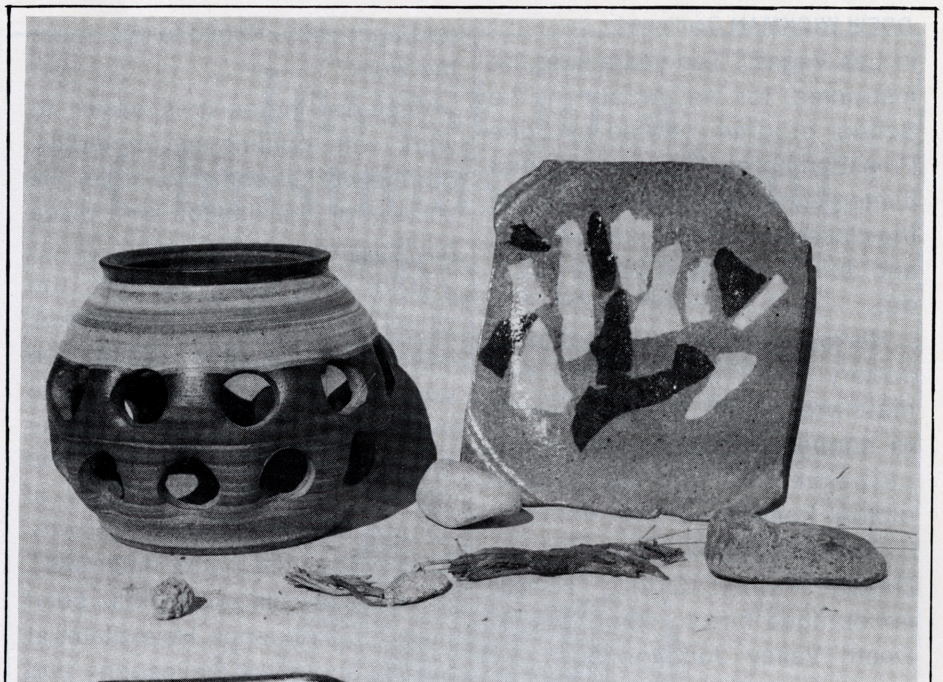
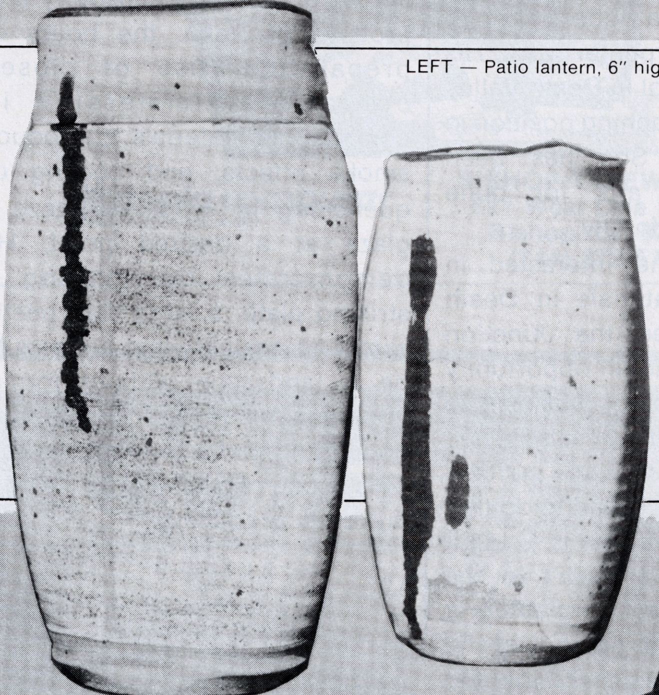
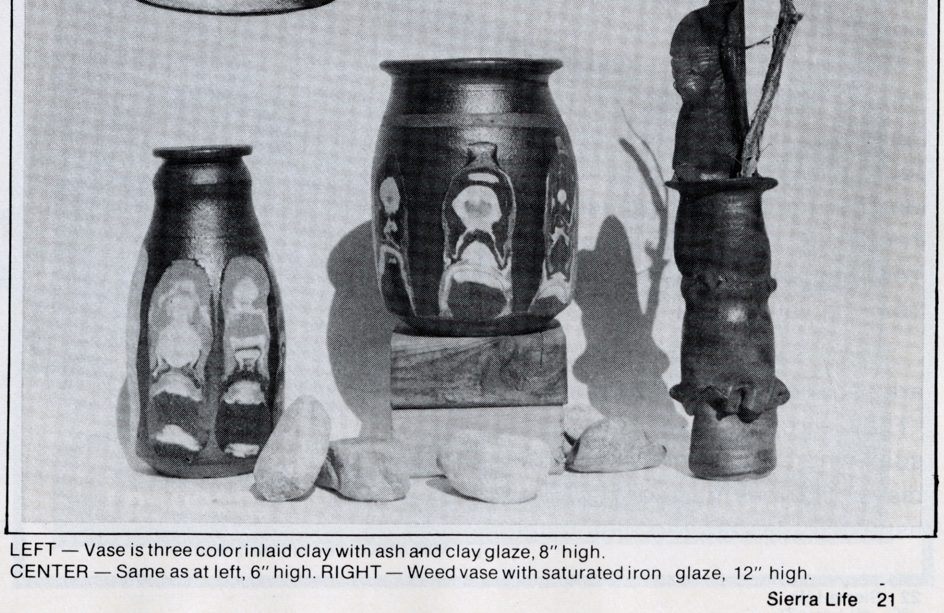


LEFT — Patio lantern, 6″ high. RIGHT— Platter, inlaid clay with clear glaze, 8″.



LEFT — Mt. St. Helens ash dust is incorporated into these two vases. They are 8″ and 10″ high.



LEFT — Vase is three color inlaid clay with ash and clay glaze, 8″ high.
CENTER — Same as at left, 6″ high. RIGHT — Weed vase with saturated iron glaze, 12″ high.

in Las Vegas." Ten years later, he instructed for an Artists in the School program offered by Lone Pine Elementary School and found it interesting that he was working in the classroom with children at last, and doing just what he wanted to do.

His work has been geared to art pottery at all times, rather than mass production. He gave lessons to support his family, did some carpentering and continued picture framing.

Tom and Marta Beckett of the Death Valley Opera House encouraged him to come over to Death Valley Junction and take over a place for a pottery shop in exchange for carpenter work. His wife taught school in Death Valley and now has a teaching position in Independence. "She has been supporting the arts for quite awhile," he says fondly.

"I first became interested in using native materials in Death Valley, but when the Junction closed down I had an opportunity to buy a small pottery business in Independence with an established sales route. It was strictly production work. I tried to do that — it's where the money is — but it drove me nuts. I wasn't in the business to make fifty planters a day so I started to sell out of the shop and do more gallery oriented work."

Drew Wickman's recognition comes from his use of native materials: clays from Diaz Lake south of Lone Pine, volcanic sand, tamarisk and mesquite ash from the desert, pinon and juniper ash from the mountains, locust ash from the valley floor.

"Most clays found around here are secondary clays," he explains. "They are washed here from somewhere else and are low fire clays." He goes into more technical aspects of his art and then laughs apologetically. "I love to talk about my work."

Wickman notes it is easier to work with commercial materials, but the work is someone else's. He strives for the illusion of a piece having grown or occurred.

"Did this piece fall off the wheel?" or "I like your mistakes better than the other things," he considers high praise. "People don't realize," he says, "that it may have taken a week — or thirty-five years — to reach that point of spontaneity and natural growth. That's why I use native materials."

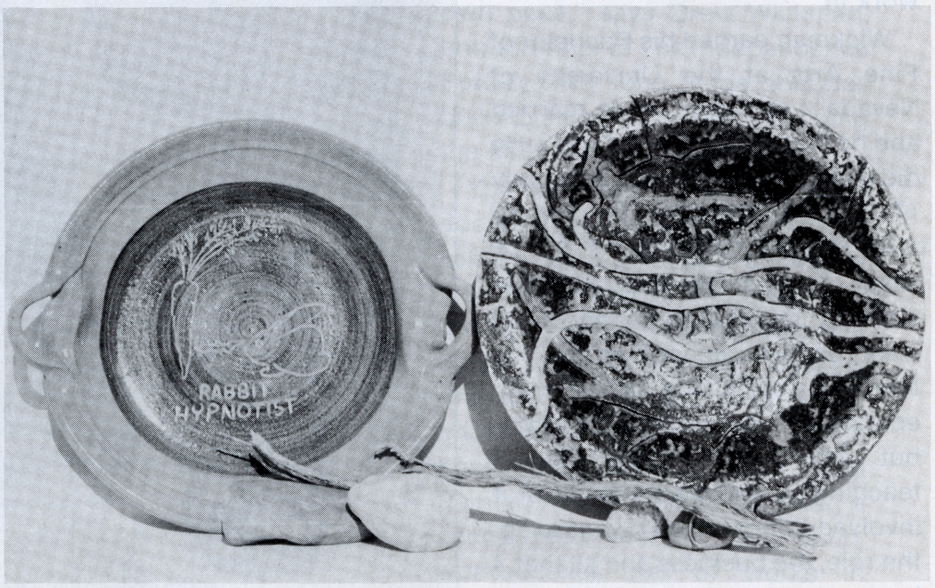
Japanese folk pottery has been his strong influence. He explains at length about the philosophy and process of Raku: the hours of preparation, use of closed containers, immersion in combustible materials to produce smoke effects, and cooling or quenching in water to freeze a glaze at a desired point. He demonstrates by showing a striking plate, a large stag beetle sketched against what appears to be a landscape without formal structure, made by incorporating cobalt and copper in the process. This is one of a special series he is currently producing.

"I am willing to use commercial material to achieve an effect. In native materials there will be flaws and impurities. I don't strain them out. You get so you can judge the variables almost intuitively." He may even use coffee grounds, table salt, or a banana peel. On utilitarian pieces, he uses a commercial glaze because they must be flawless to be used with foods.

Wickman says his ideas are usually an extension of the last thing he did. He may think of a design or an experiment while driving, in the middle of the night, or backpacking. "I write the ideas down: what if I did this or tried that?"

While he enjoys life out in the desert and the mountains, he maintains he has no hobbies. "I'm doing what I want, so I don't feel I have to get away from it. When I'm out doing anything else, I think pots."

"Working in clay shapes you as much as you shape the clay. You are working on a piece and you know what you want it to do, but it just isn't doing that. Part of being an artist is the cooperative effort between artist and material."



RIGHT — "Rabbit Hypnotist" serving platter, 12". LEFT — Platter, inlaid clay with native clay and ash dust.

DREW WICKMAN Continued

Like any artist, Wickman feels the need for space and time to carry through an idea. "I might spend as much time on a piece as a painter does on a painting, but because a potter is seen as a craftsman, similar value is not placed on it. People will ask me, 'What do you do with this?' They don't ask that about a painting. 'It doesn't do anything,' I say. 'It's just art.' I don't reproduce scenes. I make pieces from which people derive a feeling they may not even be able to articulate."

If you set out to look for The Independence Pottery, you will have to slow down on your short trip through the tiny town of Independence. Don't be distracted by the Courthouse with its white columns and strange pink tufa fountain set in the green lawns. Across the highway, in the block with the directional sign locating Mary Austin's home, and California Registered Historical Landmark No. 223 marking the site of a pioneer stone cabin, is a row of small white offices. The pottery shop is the one with "OPEN" printed on the rough wooden board in bold black letters, and the "Save Mono Lake" sticker in the window.

There are a few unique things Drew shows for special friends: pressed flower pictures by Wanda Bachman, etchings by Brent Thomson, feather jewelry by Carol Dickman. He does two shows a year, one at Mammoth and one at Boulder, and sells out of the Southern Inyo Artisans Guild Gallery in Lone Pine, but he prefers to work with people to create pieces specifically designed for their wishes.

Drew Wickman: "There are people who make money doing what they want to do. I don't look at making money as a bad thing, but it's not the most important thing."

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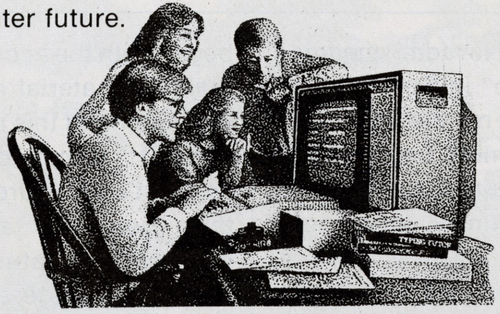

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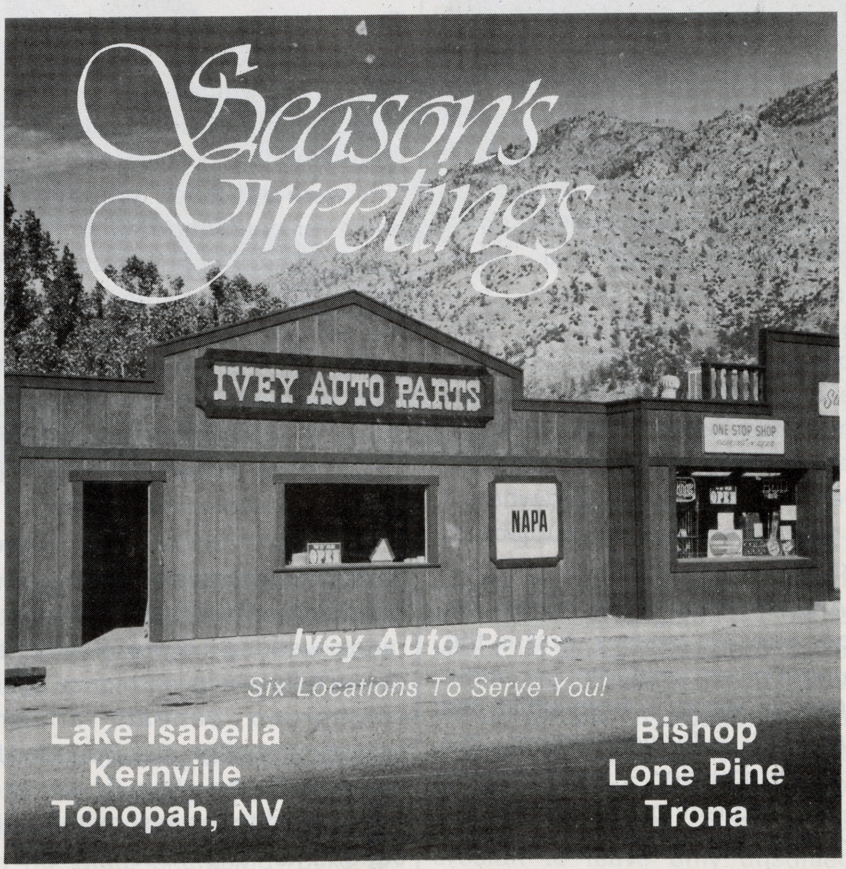

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Is the Sierra still experiencing growing pains?

by Peter Joralemon

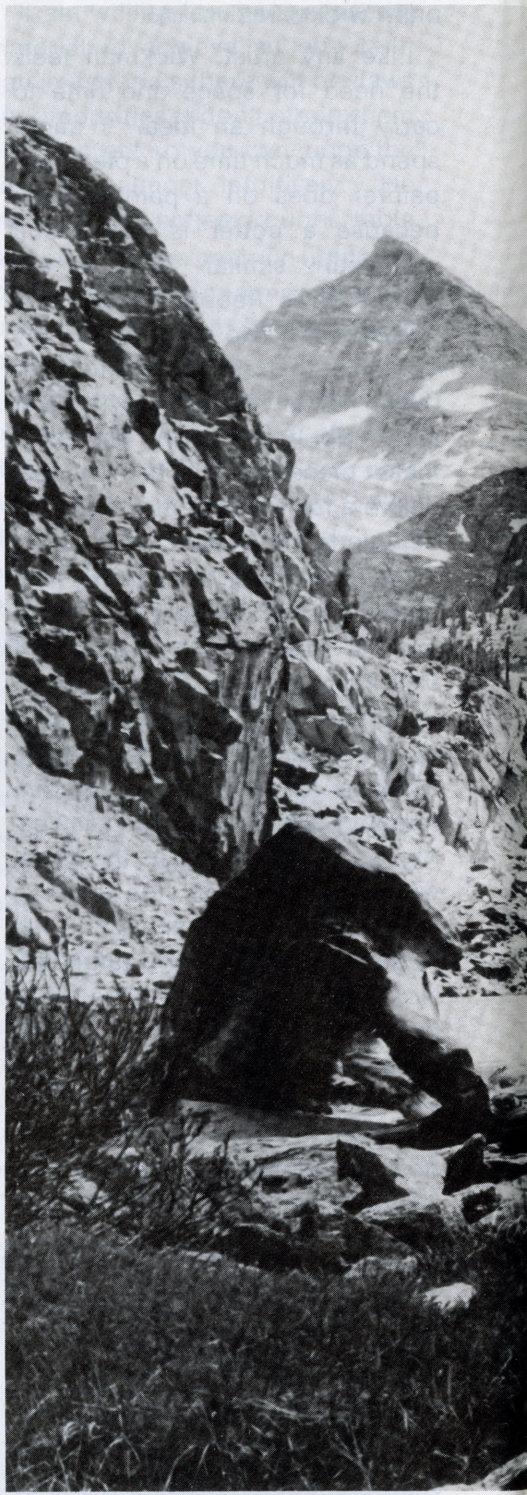
The Sierra Nevada, meaning "Snowy Range" in Spanish, has probably been viewed and appreciated by more people in the past hundred years than any other range in the country. It has been explored by nature lovers, fishermen, mountain climbers, and occasionally by scientists and naturalists such as Clarence King and John Muir, anxious to learn how this great mass came to be. The Sierra Nevada contains over a dozen peaks higher than 14,000 feet and one of them, Mount Whitney, is the highest in the continental United States. The range has the largest lake in the country at an elevation of over 6000 feet (Lake Tahoe), and contains three of the country's best known and beautiful National Parks (Yosemite, Kings Canyon, and Sequoia). Climbed, loved, and abused by over a million visitors a year, the Sierra remains a unique and little understood geologic phenomenon. How the range got there in the first place and where it is going are interesting subjects to explore.

Any sculptor must divide his work into two phases: first is the gathering of material — clay, stone, or wood — from which the statue will be formed; second is the actual production — rough carving to final polishing — to create the finished work of art. Nature, in the creation of the Sierra Nevada, began with the accumulation of the building material and ended with the carving of this material into the present piece of art. Unlike an artist's sculpture, the creation of the Sierra is a never-ending process and nature continues to modify the range: erasing that lake and starting another, flattening this cliff only to steepen the next one.

The Building Materials

The earliest geologic record of the Sierra Nevada area dates back some four hundred million years. The land was submerged beneath a broad shallow sea, flanked on the west by a volcanic archipelago, and on the east by the main continental land mass. Sands and silts were deposited in this marine basin for one hundred fifty million years. Then compressive earth forces uplifted the area to drive out the sea, crumpling the sediments into a series of northwest folds. All that remains of this ancestral Sierra is a belt of folded slate and schist that follows the western foothills of the present Sierra.

Erosional forces are never content to leave well enough alone. Wind and water attacked this early range, wearing it down into a series of low hills which were once again submerged beneath an encroaching shallow sea. Bounded to the west by the chain of volcanic islands and to the east by the main continental land mass, this sea received thick new accumulations of sediments and submarine volcanic material.



In the middle of the age of dinosaurs, about one hundred million years ago, the area of the present Sierra was pushed up out of the sea for the last time. Again the new sediments were folded into tight crenulations like so much corrugated cardboard.

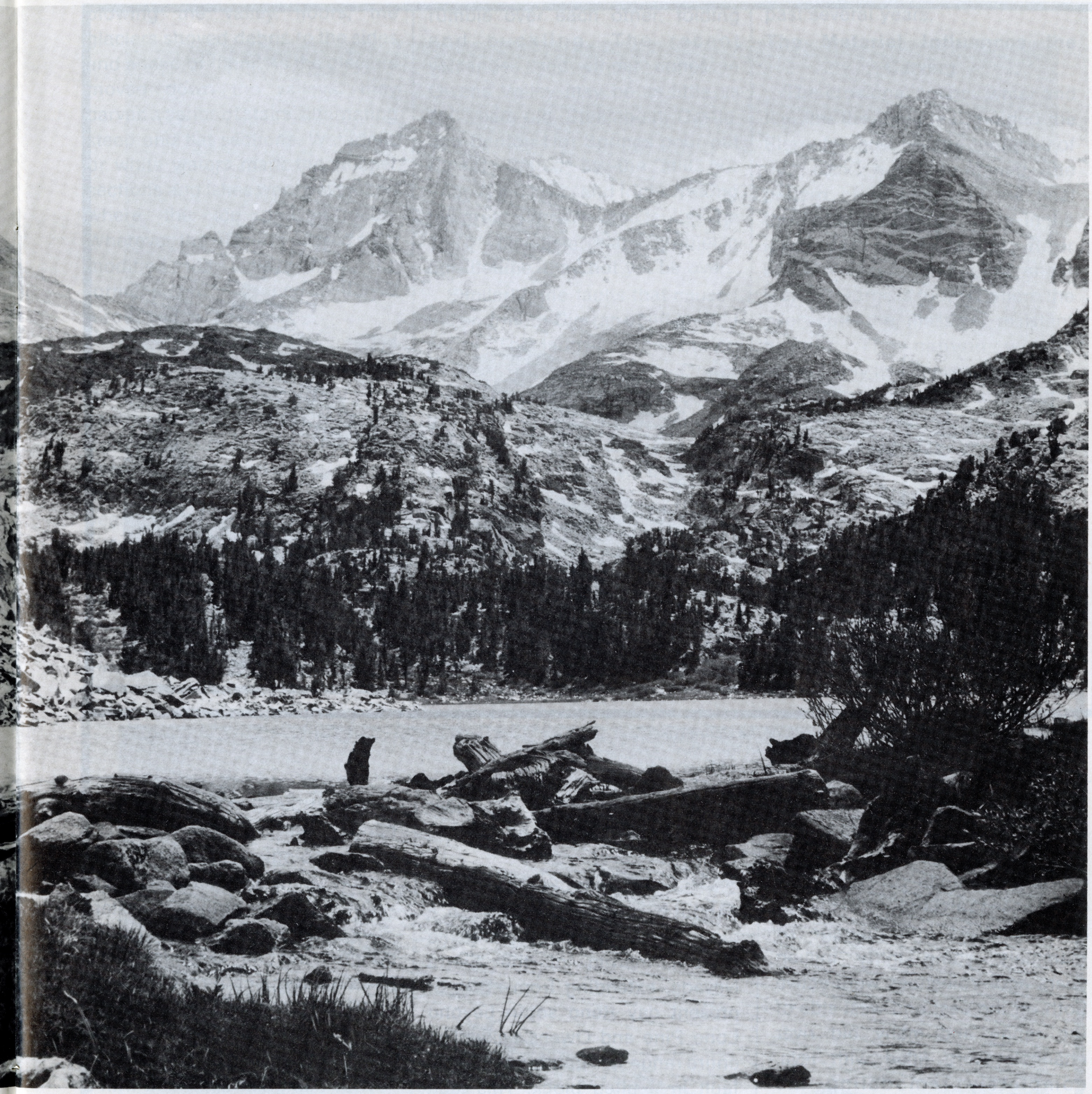


Photo by John N. Stow

All these formations now form the eastern and western borders of the main Sierra mass. The granite, the heart of the range that forms the characteristic white cliffs and bald, rounded uplands, was injected into the older rocks as a great molten mass which arched these sediments upwards. The granite slowly cooled-"froze"-beneath a cover of several miles of the older rocks, and became the Sierra Nevada batholith, extending nearly to the limits of the present range.

Mineral-bearing waters expelled from the cooling granite body permeated the chilled granite shell and the older enclosing rocks to form both the great gold deposits of the western Sierra foothills and the extensive tungsten ore bodies which lie along the eastern margin of the granite near Bishop. Much to the delight of conservationists, any ore bodies that may have been in the central core of the range have long since been stripped by erosion to leave only unsullied, pristine granite.

The east face of the tilted fault block of the Sierra Nevada has been pushed up at least 12,000 feet to form this precipitous mountain wall. Peter Joralemon Photo

Erosion, the Nemesis of the Sierra, began to strip away the mantle of sedimentary rocks to expose the granite. Broad arching of the ancestral Sierra continued at a modest rate into the age of mammals, some thirty million years ago. Volcanoes were active both on the east and west side of the range and many old river channels were filled with lava, completely remodeling the landscape.

In Mid-Tertiary times, the scene was set for the modern molding of the Sierra Nevada. The Sierra was composed of gently rolling hills quite similar to today's billowing hills perched on top of the High Sierra. Erosion created a mature topography with major rivers trending southeasterly, an inheritance from the eroded, folded mountains The higher peaks rose to about 4000 feet above sea level at that time.

The Carving Process

About twenty million years ago, a great break developed along the eastern margin of the Sierra Nevada, extending from north of present day Reno south beyond Lone Pine and Owens Lake. The entire range was uplifted along this fault in a tilted block. This fault block hinged in the present California Valley and formed a gently sloping west side, and a precipitous eastern scarp not unlike today's slopes. The higher peaks near the eastern side were pushed up to 7000 feet. As the uplift took place, new rivers began flowing down the western slopes, incising steep "V" shaped canyons. The tributaries, unable to catch up with this faster erosion, cascaded down in waterfalls from hanging valleys.

In a geologic yesterday, several million years ago, the final great uplift took place along the eastern Sierra fault, forcing the tilted block up an additional 6000 feet. The shear eastern scarp rose as much as 10,000 feet above Owens Valley and the higher peaks were above 14,000 feet.

With this great uplift and with a general change in weather conditions, vast thicknesses of snow began to accumulate in the High Sierra, forming continuous ice fields which extended for more than 100 miles. About a million years ago, mountain glaciers left their cirques (round , steep-walled valleys among mountains) and began creeping down the major valleys below the ice fields. Grinding the valley walls and

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plowing the valley floors, the glaciers shoved debris to the sides and ahead of them. As the glaciers moved down the valleys, they carved a series of stairs, alternating steep and flat sections. Waterfalls or white waters mark the steeper sections and lakes were developed where the ice plowed deep. Wherever the glaciers passed they modified the valleys from the former steep "V" shaped section to a rounded "U" section.

Three times, glaciers scraped down the valleys; three times they receded—each glacial stage and each interglacial period lasting from fifty to one hundred thousand years. Since the end of the ice age, the climate of the High Sierra has been growing increasingly dry.

The forces that formed the Sierra Nevada are still active, as continental plates continue to rumble over each other, folding and buckling. The recent volcanoes and cinder cones in Owens Valley may be as little as 500 years old. Steamboat, Castle, and Benton Hot Springs pour out waters heated by the still hot underlying lavas and friction along the great Sierra Nevada faults. The age of volcanism, relatively quiet in our lifetime, may not yet be over.

Similarly, the faults that caused the enormous Sierran uplift are still active. The landslide that buried scores of people in Camp Independence in the 1870's was triggered by a sharp earthquake along the eastern Sierra fault zone. Measurable uplift in the early 1900's and again in the 1950's was noted in the Sierra near Reno. The residents of Mammoth Lakes need no reminder of the jolts that have shaken this part of the range in the past several years.

The Material Influences the Carving

The erosional agents, water and ice, are the tools that molded the Sierra Nevada. But the character of the rock has determined the pattern of erosion and the final form of the sculpture. Thus, in the lower part of the Merced River below Yosemite Valley, the shear Merced Gorge is formed where the river cuts the massive, resistant granite. The canyon widens appreciably as it leaves the granite and enters the older and softer sediments.

Granite responds to erosion in various ways, depending on the weaknesses developed by the cooling and the mountain building forces. In places, the granite is cut by closely spaced joints and this

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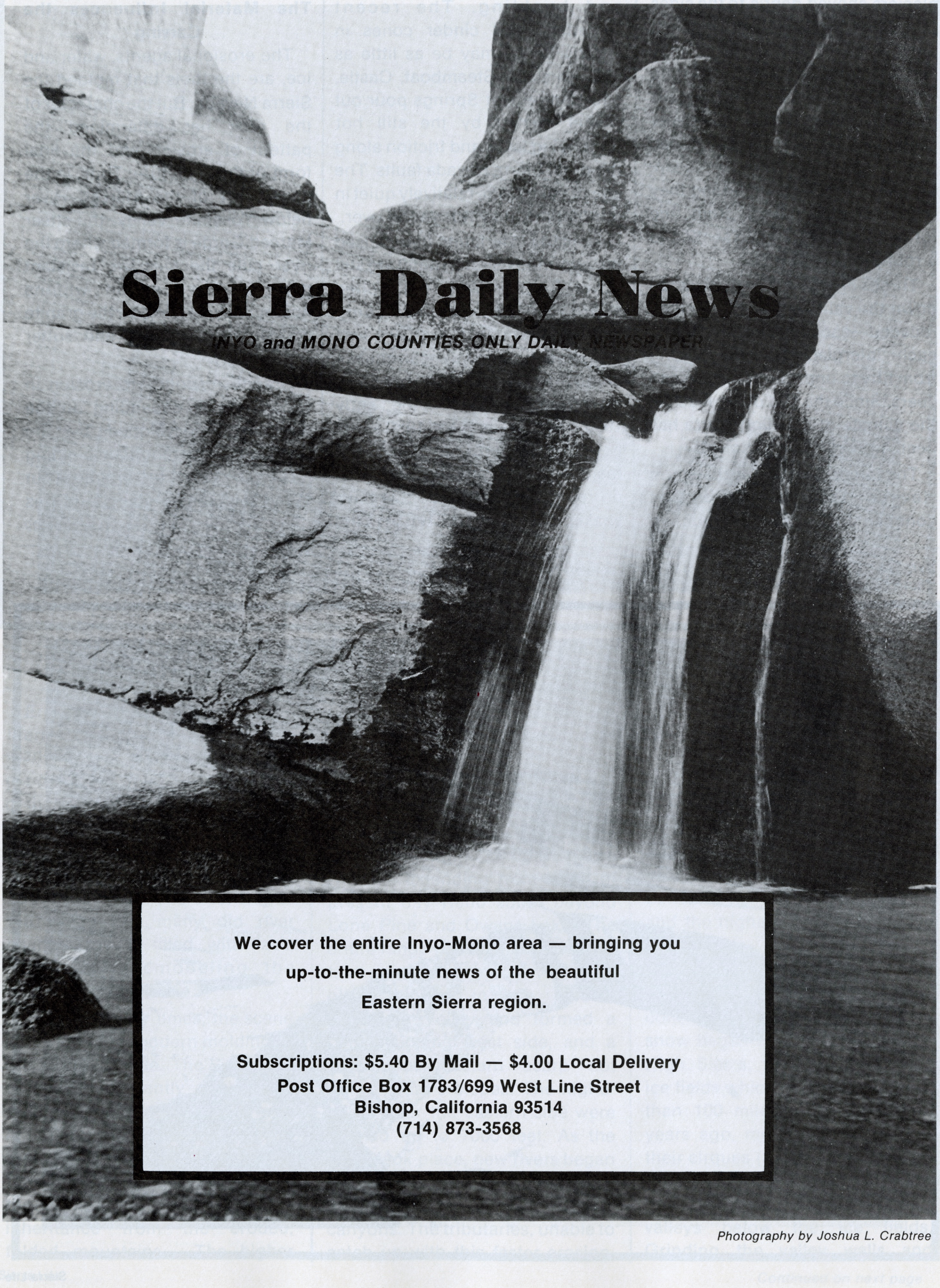
Exfoliated granite on the east side of Tioga Pass near Yosemite.
Photo by Valerie J. Naso



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Photography by Joshua L. Crabtree

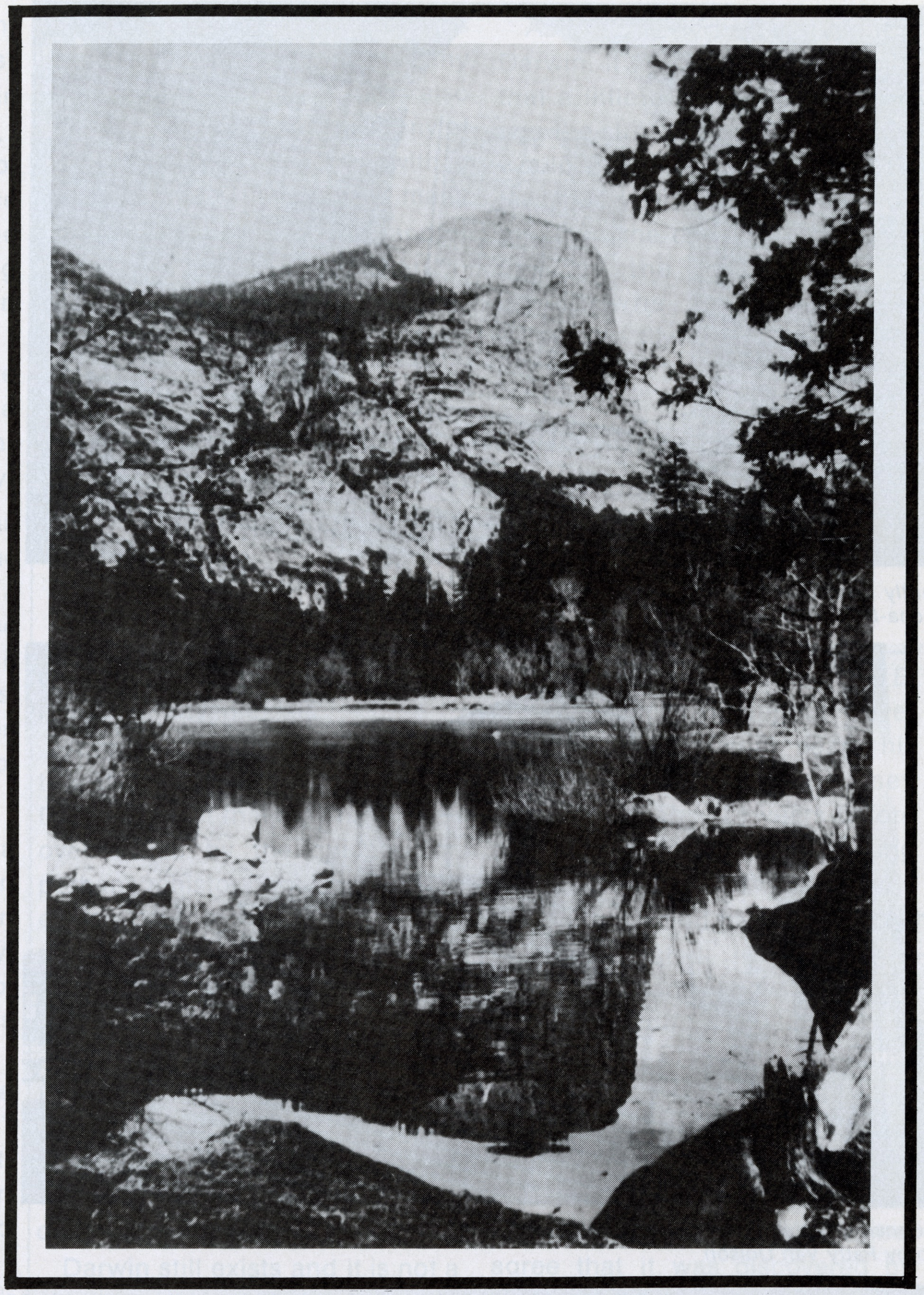
weathers to a brick-like or columnar formation such as the Devil's Postpile near Mammoth Lakes. Elsewhere, erosion of the granite is controlled by exfoliation where the rock separates along thin, rounded layers much like peelings from an onion. Such rounded surfaces are found in the High Sierra and are typified by the rounded top of Half Dome in Yosemite Valley. In other places the granite is cut by widely spaced vertical fractures to form spectacular cliffs such as the one which disects Half Dome. High, leaping waterfalls are found where ice has plucked away rock along vertical fractures. Broken cascades mark zones of broad fracturing; gliding cascades develop over exfoliated rock.

Conclusions

When I was at college, we were taught the catastrophic school of geology in which mountain building was thought to have taken place in sudden, violent spurts of short duration, separated by long periods of peace and quiet. But in retrospect, I wonder just how geologically serene this century has been. In this brief period we have witnessed whole new volcanic mountains, such as Paracutin, Mexico, spring unwanted from a farmer's fields, and another volcano, Mount St. Helens, destroy itself in violence. We have seen roads offset by as much as 50 feet along the San Andreas fault during the 1906 earthquake, and new 10 foot cliffs formed along faults in Central Nevada in 1956. Earthquakes in Turkey, Iran, Italy, and China have killed tens of thousands of people in the past decade, and erased whole cities.

It is hard to accept this idea of a century of geologic serenity. More likely, the geologic processes that have molded the world in general and the Sierra Nevada in particular have been more or less continuing efforts, brought about by the erratic movement of crustal plates, one against the other. Today, seven out of eight geologists have accepted the theories of plate tectonics and insist that the earth is a dynamic mass whose surface is constantly changing. The plates move over the earth's subsurface in varying directions — where they separate, they form oceans; where they collide, they make mountains.

The Sierra Nevada, according to the new school, is the product of repeated, seemingly aimless wanderings of plates, pulling apart and colliding, piling up great mountains and tearing them down. As some geologists believe, the next major step will be the broaching of the Sierra by the Pacific Ocean along plate boundaries, or the driving up of this great mass to tickle the sky. I cannot predict, but whatever the direction, I want to watch it from a reserved seat atop the Sierra Nevada.



Mt. Watkins in Yosemite Park owes its rounded top to exfoliated granite. Its shear wall to vertical fractures.

Photo by Peter Joralemon

DARWIN

by Gregory N. Leiber

Recently placed marker at Junction of Highway 190 and the Olancha-Darwin Road. Photo by Patty Van Dolson

Abandoned gas station in Darwin, California. Photo by Patty Van Dolson

Nancy Williams' grave marker. The marker was once stolen but returned by the thieves when bad luck plagued them. Photo by Patty Van Dolson

Nine o'clock at night in Darwin, and it's quiet. So quiet, I can almost hear the mosquitos gathering in the center of town. From my bed, I see them swarming in the glare of the town's only streetlight. Since there aren't any screens on the windows of my cabin, I'm doing more business than a 7-11 in downtown L.A.

Off in the distance, a lone coyote lets out a yelp, and is answered by a chorus of yipping and howling that is best described as other-worldly.

Darwin is a place where you can truthfully say that you're in the middle of nowhere. Nestled in a desert valley between the Coso Mountains and the Argus Range, it is a community of 30 to 40 souls, the population being dependent on the seasons and the wanderlust of its people.

I've known about Darwin for a number of years, ever since I began exploring the desert region southeast of the Owens Valley. Dutifully noted on my roadmap, Darwin is a small dot six miles south of Highway 190.

Now, desert travelers have a tendency to share the "good spots" with each other when they meet. Yet no one that I encountered on my early expeditions ever insisted that I must visit Darwin. Nor do I recall anyone ever mentioning it except in the most vague terms. As far as I knew at the time, Darwin was a ghost town without any notable ghosts, lacking the points of interest required to draw travelers on their way to Death Valley and Las Vegas.

My recent interest in Darwin was stimulated by that most ethereal of desert occurences, a rumor. I had heard from several people that the town had once been considered as the site for the capital of California.

I'd like to mention at this point that I entertained this supposed fact with a healthy amount of skepticism. While I believe that the indigenous desert legend deserves the same protection as any endangered species, I have also learned that it is best to take any of these rumors or legends with a grain of salt. There are as many shades of truth in the arid land of the Mojave as there are colors in the folds of Zabriskie Point at sunset. You must look very carefully to find the absolute truth, if indeed it even exists . . .

And yet this rumor was evidence that there might be something to Darwin, a past that may have been over-looked by the guidebooks, perhaps a history not immediately evident in the town itself. It was possible that Darwin had suffered the fate of other old mining towns, reduced to a few splintered logs by misguided souvenir hunters. Frontier towns have a way of disappearing out here, until there is no trace of the humanity that once scratched a living from the desert mountains.

Darwin still exists and it is not a ghost town. Yet I wouldn't exactly say it is a vibrant community either. It is somewhere in the netherworld of existence a town experiences when the boom times have long since passed, and people continue to live there anyway. Some of them have dreams that Darwin will return to the old days of glory and prosperity. Others hope that the world will forget that Darwin ever existed. They would just as soon see the main road bulldozed out of existence. Except the nearest stores and laundromat are 30 miles away in Lone Pine, and that paved road comes in handy from time to time.

As I lay in my bed that night in Darwin, it was difficult to imagine that a little over a hundred years ago the street outside my window would have been jumping. For a few short years, Darwin shone like a star in the desolate landscape, one of the last over-night boomtowns that inevitably followed a silver strike.

> ***"The Gunsight is probably the oldest lost mine legend in these parts." The mine was never again located after its discovery by the Death Valley 49'ers.***

Darwin is named after Dr. E. Darwin French. Although he never visited the town that bears his name, Dr. French's odyssey through the area 14 years before the silver strike was the beginning of interest in the Darwin region.

Dr. French and his companions were interested in finding a particular spot known as the Gunsight lode. The Gunsight is probably the oldest lost-mine legend in these parts, and they were neither the first nor the last people to search the desert for it.

There are many different stories regarding the Gunsight, but most agree that it was discovered by members of the ill-fated 49ers who also discovered and named Death Valley.

Enroute to the goldfields, a number of parties from a large wagon train decided to try a more direct route to the western Sierra. Ignoring advice from others, the settlers headed due west from Poverty Point in the Wasatch Mountains. They hoped to save five hundred miles and several months traveling time.

Instead, they have the dubious distinction of being the first white people to see and eventually cross Death Valley. Struggling through

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the waterless Funeral Mountains and across the valley floor, they left behind a trail of burned wagons, dead oxen and solitary graves.

Survivors of the ordeal brought back stories of a mountain of silver located somewhere east of the Panamint Mountains. Since at the time of its discovery the beleaguered 49ers were more interested in their own survival than in mineral riches, all they had to show as evidence were some ore samples.

The more colorful version of the story says that one of the survivors had a gunsmith fashion a gunsight from one of the samples, and it was found to be pure silver. Hence the name Gunsight, and to this day there are folks still searching for this El Dorado of the American desert.

Dr. French organized the main part of his expedition in Oroville in early 1860. The group then moved on to Visalia where a number of additional men joined the party. Their route took them through Walker Pass, past Little Lake and on to Coso Springs. It was near the springs that the explorers first saw the Coso Ledges, veins of rich silver-ore.

But the party pressed on, the lure of a mountain of silver far stronger than the Coso find. They camped in and named Darwin Wash, location of the present town, before traveling on to the Panamint Valley and beyond.

Although Dr. French and the others eventually reached Death Valley via a pass in the Panamints, they never found the fabled Gunsight. By May of 1860, the group had returned to the Coso Ledges and word had started to spread throughout the state of Coso's riches. While the amount of silver found there never fulfilled the dreams of its discoverers, it did open the area to mining enterprises for the first time.

It wasn't until October 1874 that silver-lead deposits were found in the Darwin Hills. Rafael Cuervo, a Mexican miner from Cerro Gordo, filed the first recorded silver claim, naming it Promontorio. Soon after, Rafael also filed claims for the La Estrella, San Rafael, Cuervo and Salaya mines.

Other miners followed the news of these discoveries, and by the end of 1874 most of the major mines had been discovered, including the Lucky Jim, Christmas Gift, and Defiance. The Darwin mines became a part of the New Coso Mining District. Then the work began in earnest.

When miners first began arriving in Darwin, they were not particularly interested in the desert beauty of the location. There was money in the hills, and, by golly, they were going to get it out. There also was no such thing as an Environmental Protection Agency in those days, and the idea of an environmental impact report hadn't been born yet. The miners dug where there was silver and they dug where they pleased. And dig they did.

It was hard, dangerous work with long hours. In the beginning, blasting holes were drilled by hand, there being no power to drive the newly-invented pneumatic drills.

Drilling by hand was called 'hand jacking'. One man using a 4 pound sledge while rotating the steel chisel was known as 'single jacking'. 'Double jacking' was one man holding and rotating the steel, while one or two men struck it with an 8 pound sledge. A good team of double-jackmen could deliver as many as 60 blows a minute and drill 2″ into solid granite. Usually it took an hour to drill a 30″ hole.

There are more than 30 miles of tunnels, stopes, raises, winzes, shafts, crosscuts and other types of holes in the Darwin Hills. The deepest shaft is over 1,400 feet straight down. A monument to the tenacity of desert miners, it is destined to remain buried in the rock, hidden from sight forever.

While the miners toiled, Darwin began to take shape and grow. Victor Beaudry was a prominent newcomer whose name helped attract other people to the area. Along with Mortimer T. Belshaw, Beaudry had been instrumental in the boom at Cerro Gordo, establishing the important Union Mine. A year after its opening, the Union had become the most productive silver mine in the United States.

Beaudry's earlier experiences would help him in Darwin. The town had an inadequate supply of water, a problem similar to that of the Cerro Gordo camp. Beaudry constructed a 12 mile pipeline that brought water to Darwin from Coso Springs. The pipe was made of steel and was hand-riveted as it was built.

Beaudry's efforts were not of philanthropic origin, however. He wanted to be the water baron of Darwin and he saw a good way to make lots of money. It's not clear if he greatly benefited from his scheme, since it is said that the original pipeline leaked very badly and couldn't supply enough water for the town and the mines. But a modern plastic pipeline now follows essentially the same route as Beaudry's creation, and it is the main source of water in present-day Darwin.

Once water became available, the town began to grow. 1875 saw the coming of saloons, general stores, hotels, stables, blacksmiths, land developers, a post office and a newspaper. At its zenith, Darwin had nine general stores, two hotels, at least one brewery, 15 saloons, and over 1,000 inhabitants.

Mining towns were tough places. While Darwin never acquired a reputation for lawlessness equaling Bodie or Tombstone, shootings were common and only

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DARWIN Continued

a minimal amount of frontier justice prevailed. A deputy sheriff reportedly said that "of 124 graves in the cemetery, 122 were filled by the work of bullet or knife." While that may be an exaggerated claim, we can be certain that life in Darwin included a measurable risk of one's life above and beyond the normal pitfalls of existence.

An unexpected victim of frontier violence was a woman named Nancy Williams. Nancy ran a boarding house in Darwin and was well known in the eastern Sierra. She was noted for her generousity and willingness to support public causes. On September 12, 1877, Nancy's body was discovered in the boarding house.

> ***"The grieving citizens of Darwin offered $1,270 as reward money for the capture of the murderer, but he was never found."***

The grieving citizens of Darwin offered $1,270 as reward money for the capture of the murderer, but he was never found. Miners in the town collected money and hired Remi Nadeau (the teamster-owner responsible for the successful freightlines of Cerro Gordo) to deliver to Darwin a monument for Nancy's grave. This was not a small expense in those days, with freight being very expensive, and it is an indication of the miners' respect for Nancy.

It's really not too surprising that Nancy's headstone plays a major role in a bona-fide Darwin legend.

It seems that in the not-so-distant past two tourists drove into Darwin one day. A Darwinite by the name of Jean Thorsen showed the couple around town, and the tour probably included the town cemetery.

The tourists eventually went on their way, but not until they had pilfered a portion of the monument as a souvenir. They stole either the shaft part or the base of the monument: I've heard it both ways. At any rate, it must have been a bit of a job since the edifice is of considerable size and probably weighs several hundred pounds.

It's not clear whether the good people of Darwin ever noticed the monument was missing. But it was not very much time before an express shipment containing the stolen portion of the monument arrived at the Darwin post office. Along with the package was a letter which read "Get this stone back on Nancy's grave. We've had nothing but trouble ever since we took it." The worst-case scenario has the tourists' car breaking down somewhere between Darwin and Los Angeles. When they finally did arrive home, they were greeted by the still smoldering ruins of their house . . .

As for the story about Darwin being considered as the state capital, I can only report that the story is not widely known in Darwin today. Nor is there any solid evidence readily available which substantiates the claim. At one time Darwin was suggested as the county seat for a proposed Monache County, part of a movement to separate from Inyo County that never got off the ground. If the citizenry of Darwin ever had aspirations to crown their city as the state capital, they were most likely lost and forgotten a long time ago.

Darwin's heyday did not last very long. The cost of transportation and mining had resulted in the use of only the richest grade ore. Mining low-grade ore was not cost-effective. As the heavily-oxidized silver-lead ores were exhausted, each of the three smelters shut down. The Defiance smelter was the first to go, in August 1876.

The town gradually declined through 1877, and in 1878 a local union known as the Workingmen's Club called a strike when wages for

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smelter workers went from $4 to $3 a day. The strike lasted several months, and even though the union eventually dissolved and work resumed, Darwin would never be the same again.

Mining has been sporadic since 1880, even though there have always been believers that Darwin would rise again. In 1945, Anaconda Copper Company reopened the Darwin Mines. The area became the largest lead-producing region in California, supplying two-thirds of the state's production. The old Defiance Mine was one of the four most active mines. The lead operation closed down in 1957.

Anaconda is again preparing to begin operations in Darwin, using a chemical-leaching process to extract minerals from the mine tailings. The low-grade ore that was dumped because it was too costly to process may make the Darwin Mines profitable once again. There will not be any deep mining of the remaining shafts or mineral veins.

The new mining operation will provide only minimal economic benefits for Darwin. Only two of the townspeople have hired on to work at the mine. And most of the small group of miners needed will be living in Keeler or Lone Pine, in order to conserve water needed for the leaching process.

Today Darwin lacks the 19th Century charm of some of the more famous mining towns. It is a hodge-podge of trailers and houses built in the last 50 years or so. Most of the town burned during two major fires in 1916 and 1917. Only a couple of the original structures remain.

Near the center of town stands a wooden frontier schoolhouse. Originally built in 1876 to house a saloon, it was converted to a school in 1899 after the original school burned.

Crosson's Place, across the street from the old post office/gas station, was the miners' union hall. The original building is metal, which allowed it to escape the fires. It now has several additions, including the facade, and it has seen many different uses.

The post office and gas station are in separate buildings now. I'd prefer to watch the old-style gas pumps fill with fuel and see them empty into my tank. But you can't stop progress. Except it sometimes seems that when progress has touched Darwin, it didn't stay quite long enough to finish the job.

It takes a special kind of person to live in a town like Darwin. That's not to say that they are all alike, or even that everyone gets along. But they share an appreciation for the grandeur of the desert, and each in his way seeks the solitude it offers.

People are independent here. As one acquaintance remarked as we sat in front of a roaring fire, "Folks out here just don't pick up the phone and call a repairman when something breaks. First of all, they probably don't have the money to do it. Second, what repairman will travel 60 desert miles to fix something? Third and most important: The people would rather do it themselves. And why the hell shouldn't they?"

On the other hand, if someone should see your car stopped on the shoulder of a desert highway, they will more than likely check to see if you're okay. At the very least they'll wave as they drive by. Desert dwellers are like that. It doesn't really matter whether they are generally more altruistic, or merely acknowledge the fact that one day *they* may be stuck. The point is that it happens, and it is a unique thing in today's world.

Frances Black moved to Darwin from Texas in 1951. The mayor of the town by consensus, Frances

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DARWIN Continued

has been in Darwin longer than almost anybody.

"I didn't think I'd stay 30 days, and I've been here 30 years," says Frances. "We were lucky to get anything to live in when we came to Darwin. The mine was operating and it looked like we would have to live in one of the dug-outs."

Frances now lives in a comfortable old house near the center of town. She is as close to a native of Darwin there is these days, and she is also one of its more ardent supporters. It doesn't take much to get Frances to talk of the old days.

"There were a lot of characters here. You couldn't write about all of them! Let's just say that they were different . . .". If Frances' memory were to come to life, the streets would be filled with people, the saloons alive with rough men and even rougher women.

A short walk from Frances' house is sculptor Gordon Newell's outdoor studio, looking over the nicest view in town. A collection of weathered wood dominates the front-yard and adds to the rustic atmosphere of the place.

Gordon moved to Darwin 8 years ago, seeking the solitude and proximity to nature necessary for his work. His life is simple, and his art reflects the feeling of the desert environment. He is a person of few words, but Gordon is clear about the reason he came to Darwin. "They have changed everyplace, and I wouldn't want to see it happen in Darwin." Since coming to the town from the Monterey bay area, Gordon has found contentment in the Darwin of today, and he does not actively seek a return to the former days of glory. It is his last stand against the wheels of progress, and he couldn't have chosen a better place.

Darwin is a town that the hands of government seldom touch, and the citizens appreciate the lack of attention. That's the way it should be — as little official government as possible until needed. Like after a flood. And that isn't likely to happen in Darwin for a long, long time.

There have been some recent changes that anchor Darwin a bit more securely in the 20th Century. A museum detailing the mining history of the town has been operating for more than a year, largely through the efforts of Lucy Lowrance and the New Coso Heritage Society. It's one of the few small-town museums I've seen where I actually learned something from the exhibits. And it's kind of surprising to find it in Darwin, a town smaller than most.

The society was also responsible for the recent placement of a marker at the junction of Highway 190 and the Olancha-Darwin Road. Except for the road leading to Darwin through a joshua tree forest, it is the only indication of Darwin's existence on that lonely stretch of highway.

Both of these projects were met with some resistance by Darwin citizens who fear for the ambience of the town. Now that the monument is in place, only time will tell if hordes of tourists in air-conditioned buses will begin including Darwin on their itineraries.

So why live in Darwin today? Well, there aren't any sirens in Darwin. Traffic never builds up around five o'clock. And it really isn't necessary to lock your door. Darwin may look sleepy, but its citizens *know* when a stranger crosses the city limits. And as I mentioned before, it's quiet.

But I think Frances Black has the best reason of all for living in Darwin:

"I just love to see the snow on the Coso Mountains."

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View looking southwest from near the top of Montgomery Pass. White Mountains are in the distance. The area has fluorite.

Photo by Valerie J. Naso

Bishop Gem Trails

by Valerie J. Naso

Gems and minerals have always held a fascination for collectors, especially when there is an opportunity to gather beautiful crystals or chunks of jasper and agate under a clear blue sky in the high desert. Whether you are a weekend rock hound or a beginner makes no difference; the eastern slopes of the California High Sierra and the adjacent part of Nevada offer many places where semi-precious gems and fine specimen pieces may be found for a day's looking.

If your base is Bishop, California, you have an almost unlimited field to explore. The Buttermilk Country is nine miles west of town off of State Route 168, known locally as The Sabrina Road for the lake at the top. Only a small Buttermilk Road street sign marks the turn. Follow this graded dirt road 3.4 miles and the large sandy pit area on the right is a fine place to hunt for the quartz crystals that sparkle in the sun and may measure up to an inch or more. Other areas in the Buttermilk have amethyst crystals, but beyond this first spot a truck is advisable.

Quality crystals are also found up the rugged Silver Canyon Road that starts at Laws four miles north east of Bishop and climbs straight up into the White Mountains. This is four wheel drive only.

Glass Mountain, or Obsidian Dome is north of Bishop by about 50 miles. Take Highway 395 to Glass Flow Road and turn west. As the name implies, the site has obsidian including the beautiful brown and black variety.

All kinds of obsidian-silver sheen,golden sheen, translucent, black and brown are found strewn over the ground at Truman Meadows some ten miles north of Old Benton. There is such a large supply that you can't come away empty handed. An occasional arrowhead may be spotted by a sharp eye, but these are becoming increasingly rare.

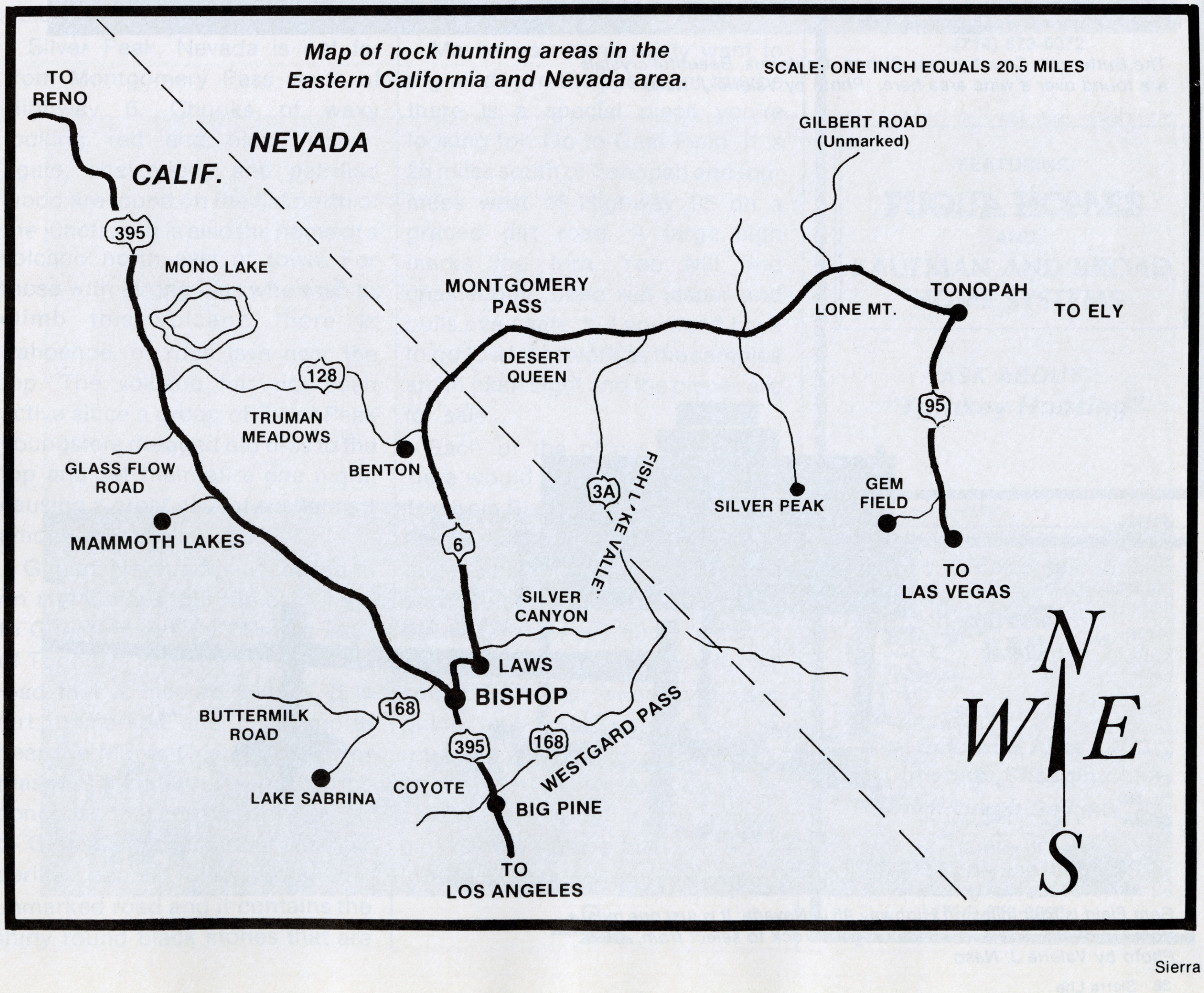
The Coyote Hills are south west of Bishop by 15 miles and the area is good for garnets.

Obsidian is also found near Montgomery Pass just beyond the Nevada state line and north of the highway. Montgomery Pass - Highway 6 - is a fascinating area where fluorite in wonderful shades of green and amethyst can be

Continued on page 39

CAUTION
MINIMUM MAINTENANCE
ONLY

This unmarked dirt road leads to a large deposit of Apache tears near Gilbert, Nevada. Photo by Valerie J. Naso


Map of rock hunting areas in the Eastern California and Nevada area.
SCALE: ONE INCH EQUALS 20.5 MILES
TO RENO
NEVADA
CALIF.
395
MONO LAKE
128
TRUMAN MEADOWS
GLASS FLOW ROAD
MAMMOTH LAKES
BENTON
MONTGOMERY PASS
DESERT QUEEN
6
3A
FISH LAKE VALLEY
SILVER PEAK
GILBERT ROAD (Unmarked)
LONE MT.
TONOPAH
TO ELY
95
GEM FIELD
TO LAS VEGAS
SILVER CANYON
LAWS
BISHOP
168
BUTTERMILK ROAD
LAKE SABRINA
395
168
WESTGARD PASS
COYOTE
BIG PINE
TO LOS ANGELES
N
W
E
S

The Buttermilk Country near Bishop, California. Beautiful crystals are found over a wide area here. Photo by Valerie J. Naso

GEM
FIELD
GEM
CHALCEDONY
OPEN

Gem Field is four miles off Highway 95 in Nevada. It is just one mile from Goldfield. There is a wide range of rock to select from. Photo by Valerie J. Naso found off the road and slightly south. The best way to reach the area is to take the abandoned dirt road that leaves the highway 46 miles east of Bishop and cuts across the long sloping valley near the old Desert Queen Mine. The small cone shaped peak that dominates the view is red with cinnebar. The road to the top of this peak is winding and requires a truck.

Fish Lake Valley is an issolated area east of Bishop that can be reached from either Westgard Pass or Montgomery Pass. At the upper end of the valley is a place called The Sump where petrified palm is found.

Marble Canyon is 11 miles southeast of Bishop and three miles west of Westgard Pass. This area has fluorite, but if you're after the big stuff it is also known for gold nuggets.

Silver Peak, Nevada is not far from Montgomery Pass south of Highway 6. Chunks of waxy looking red and black jasper, agate, chalcedony and petrified wood are found on the flat north of the junction. It is also the home of a volcano north east of town. For those with strong legs who wish to climb this volcano there is Pahoehoe, or rope lava near the top. The volcano has not been active since a group of Silver Peak youngsters dragged old tires to the top and set them afire one night, causing a great deal of excitement among the locals.

Gilbert, Nevada will not be found on many maps, but the back road to Gilbert is exactly 20 miles west of Tonopah, or 13 miles east of the road that is marked Gilbert. It is dirt, unmarked and heads north near the Monte Cristo Range. For reasons unknown it seems to be conceded that you cannot ever get to Gilbert by the marked road. A perlite deposit lies along the unmarked road and it contains the shiny round black stones that are commonly called Apache tears. The perlite is a rock forming silicate and large chunks containing many tears can be found and as you approach the heart of the area the ground becomes thickly covered with the glittering black stones.

Gilbert? Turn left off the Apache tears road and you will be on the back road to this elusive ghost town.

Lone Mountain rises like a ship out of the desert some 25 miles west of Tonopah and is famous for its turquoise. It is so sought after that the area is fairly well picked over, but if you want to try your luck you might still come up with a lovely piece of turquoise. If not, any one of the canyons is a fine spot for a picnic.

The town of Tonopah is booming once again, but the surrounding area is known for algae wood.

Maybe you don't really want to dig all day in the desert, or maybe there is a special piece you're looking for. Go to Gem Field. It is 25 miles south of Tonopah and four miles west of Highway 95 on a graded dirt road. A large sign marks the turn. You will find chalcedony, deep red jasper and bulls eye agate, but you don't have to go to a lot of work as the samples are in plain sight and the pieces are for sale.

Each of the places mentioned here would make an ideal one day trip from Bishop. Some of the spots are isolated. However, they are quite safe if you remember the basic rules of travel anywhere in the desert. Always carry water, a hat and a jacket. If possible, let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return. If you plan on serious rock hunting you may want a prospector's pick, a ten power glass and a sample bag.

Pack a lunch and happy hunting.

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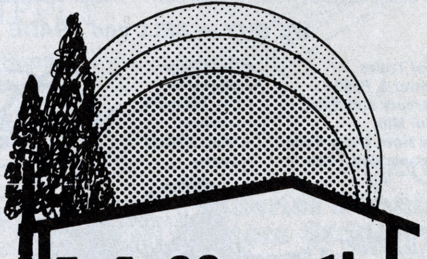

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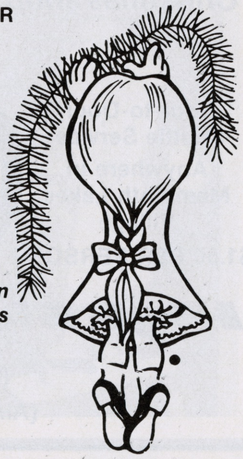

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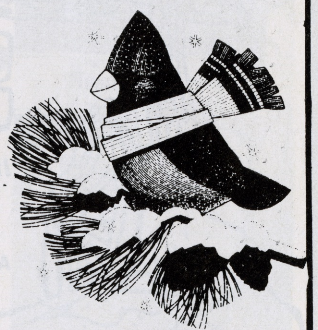

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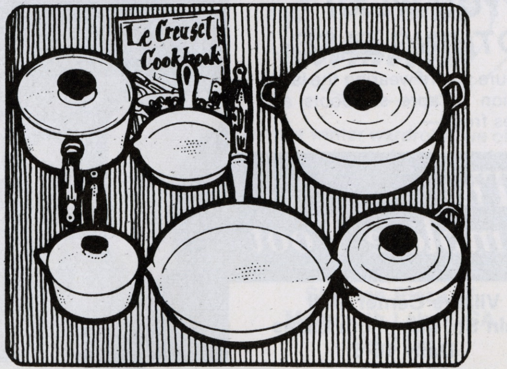

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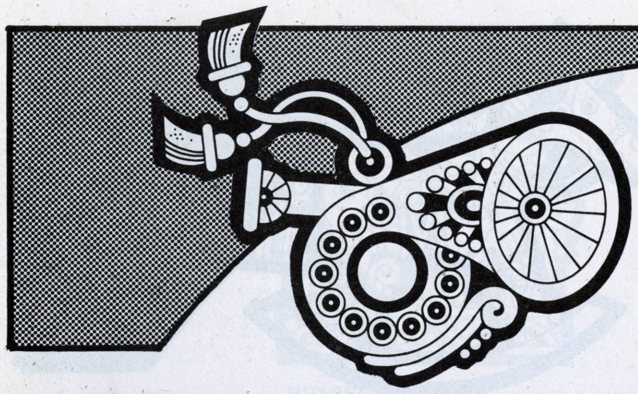

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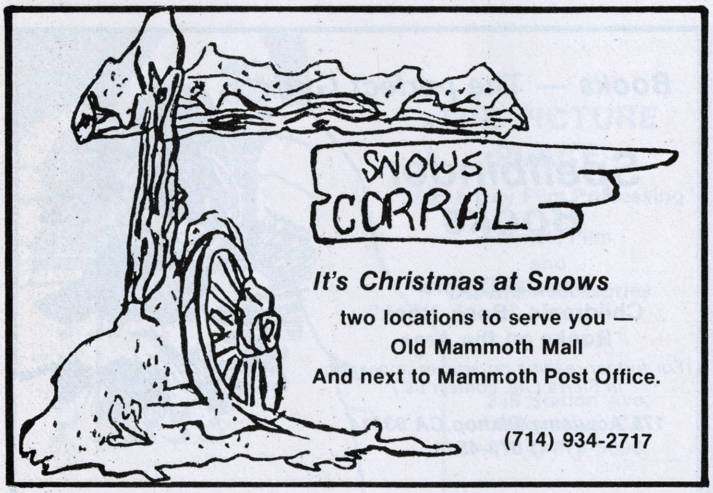

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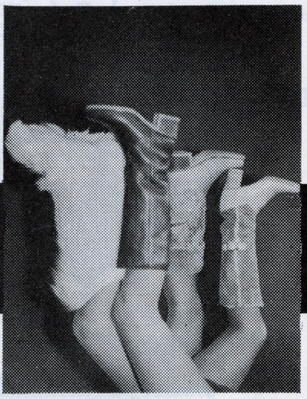

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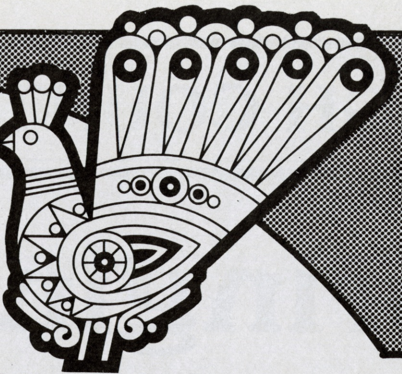

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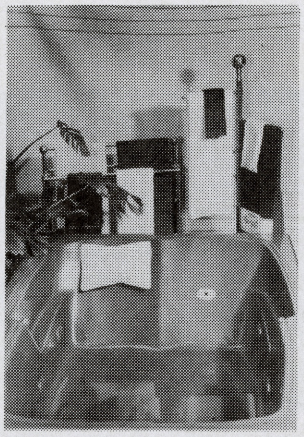

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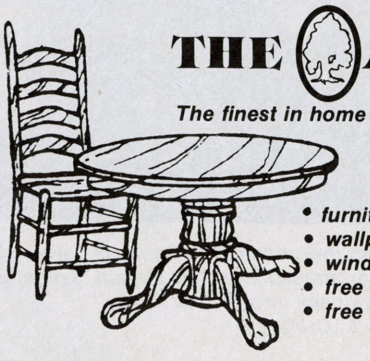

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Advertising photography by Joshua L. Crabtree and Tim Snyder

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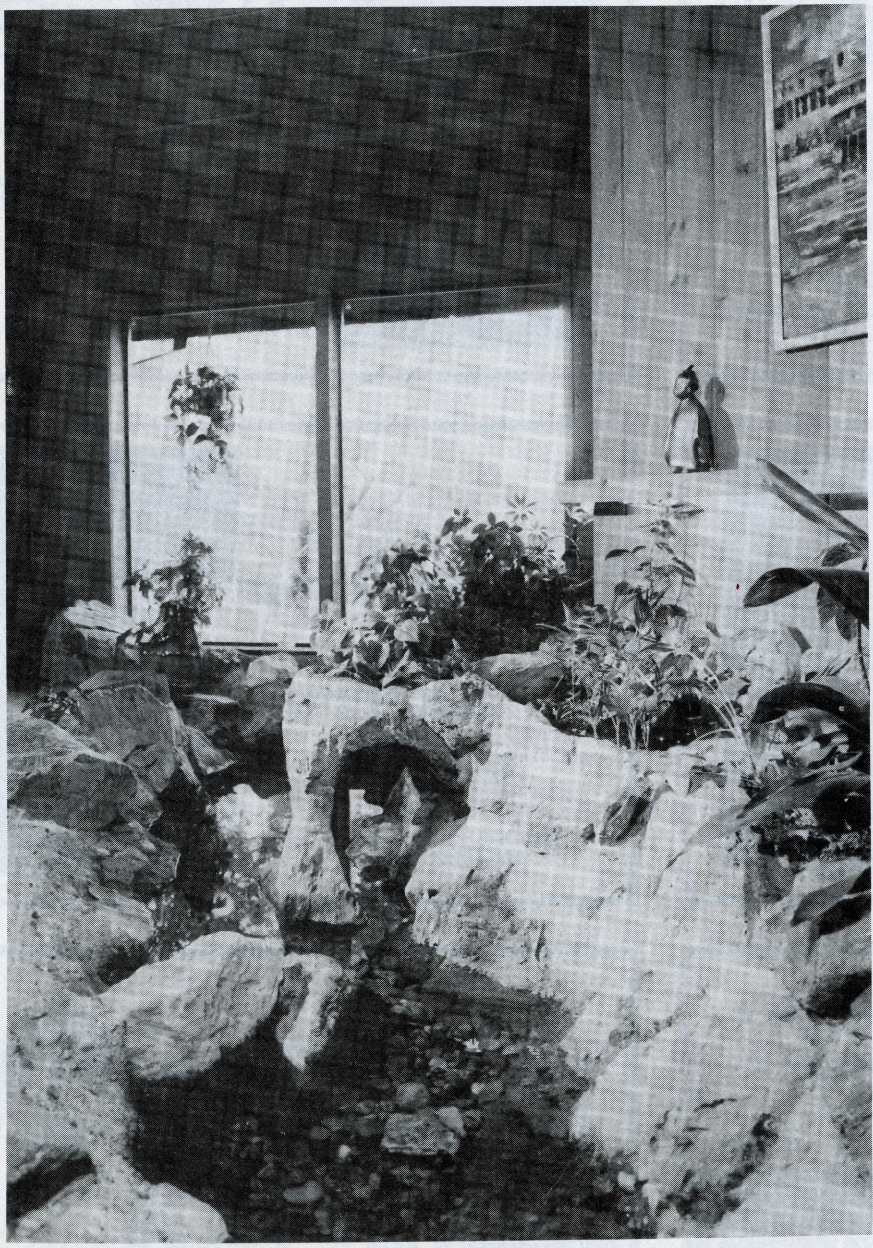
Bringing Outdoors In



By bringing a stream into their home, the Oxararts have accomplished an outdoor atmosphere. The stream is pumped into the house and then flows back into Bishop Creek.
Photography by Joshua L. Crabtree

Frank and Elaine Oxarart have created an outdoor atmosphere in their West Bishop home . . .

Most people are content to seek out a sparkling stream on a sunny afternoon, spending a few hours on its bank listening to the music of the water as it flows over the rocks. Frank and Elaine Oxarart have gone one step further — their home has a stream flowing through the living room.

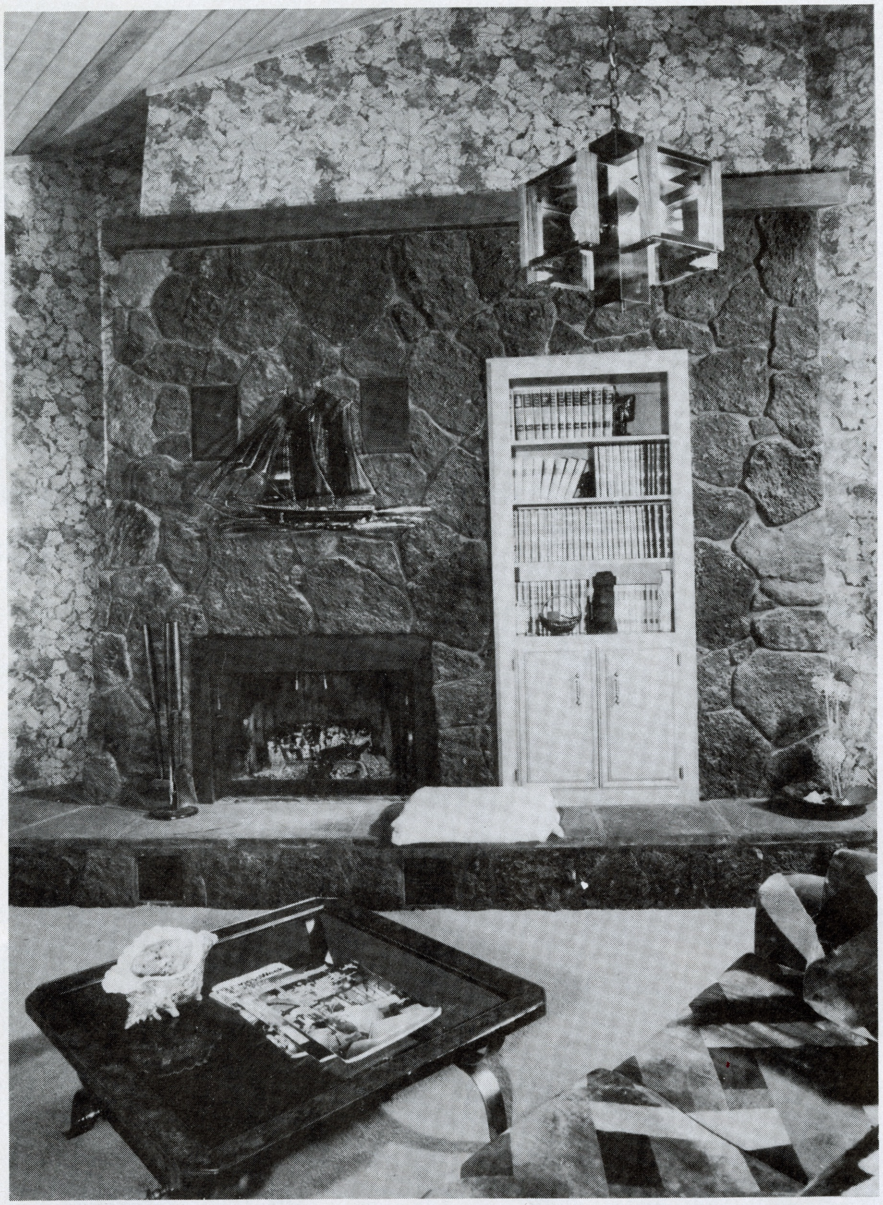
The Oxarart home is located in West Bishop and was constructed three years ago by local contractors. It took the talents of three architects to design the house and to overcome the many problems incurred by bringing the stream indoors.

The house took over eighteen months to construct. It is built with 2 x 6 beams instead of the standard 2 x 4 s. The house is well insulated for soundproofing and energy efficiency.

Continued on page 46

Frank Oxarart relaxes in his West Bishop home.
Photography by Joshua L. Crabtree

METRO CALENDAR
Court Urged to Act on Death Penalty



The den features a natural rock fireplace with raised hearth and built-in bookcases with storage. Photography by Joshua L. Crabtree

BRINGING OUTDOORS IN *(Continued)*

Water from Bishop Creek is pumped through the living room and then flows back into the creek. The stream flows through the house 24 hours a day except during heavy storms when the water turns muddy.

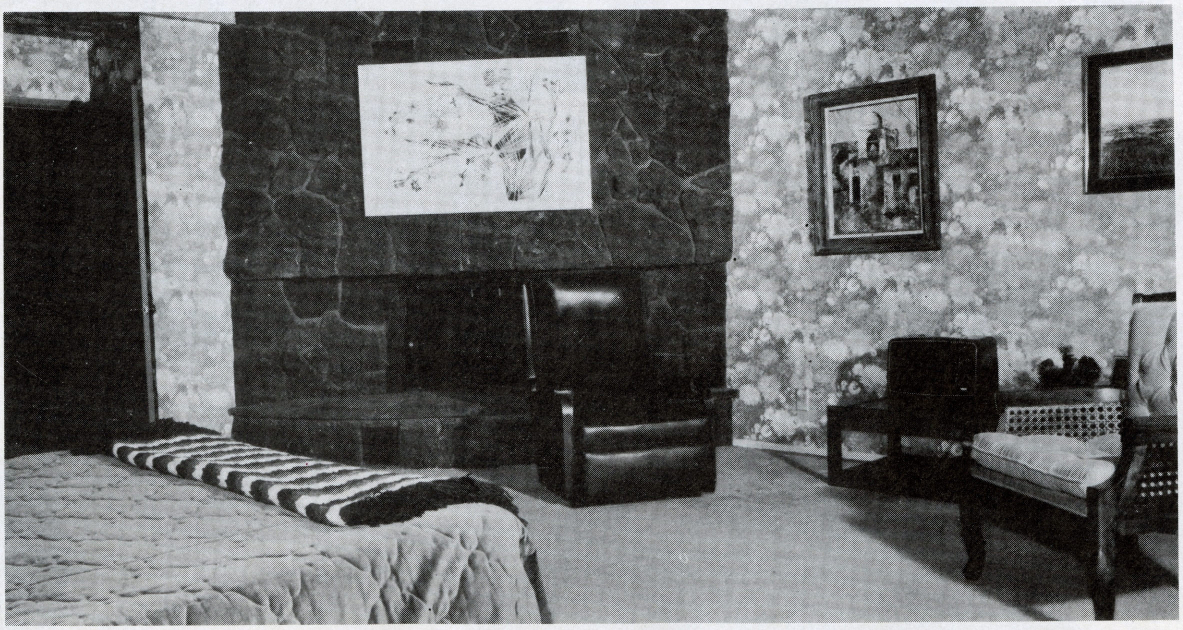
To complete the "outdoor" atmosphere of the home, large windows are used throughout. Every view from the house is picturesque.

The Oxararts have lived in Bishop for six years, coming from the Marysville/Yuba City area.

Elaine is an accomplished artists and has a studio in their home. She has fashioned a gallery out of a wide, well lighted hallway which is a focal point in the home.

Frank is a successful businessman who recently sold his interest in KIBS Radio in Bishop.

Living in the High Sierra has many advantages — a stream running through your living room and ducks playing in your backyard pond are a few of them.



The master bedroom features a natural rock fireplace. Photography by Joshua L. Crabtree

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from the Diary of a Country Woman . . .

by Jane Fisher

Ed. Note: Besides being a talented writer, poet and Associate Editor for SIERRA LIFE, Jane Fisher is also Mayor of the City of Bishop. She shares with us some warm thoughts about Christmas that are sure to bring back memories to most everyone.
S.P.

The fire burns low. This hour is mine. The Christmas tree trembles and glitters, Schubert's Symphony No. 8 ("Unfinished") moves softly into the Andante con moto, the candle flickers out. Juniper berries on the firebricks ooze pine and bitter lemon, and out of the shadows swell the mists of collected memories, generations of a family's own Christmas lay-away plan.

Stockings, snow, silver, presents, pine, pinenuts, church bells, carols, candles, turkey, tears, tinsel.

After the shopping and sewing, pleading and hiding, the school play signals the beginning of Christmas events. No one misses the school play. Babies in pajamas, mamas in woolens and furs, papas handsome and clean, grandparents shushing, lovers self-consciously aware of new twosomeness. Stage lights gleam in long fingers across the waxed floor, and from behind the velvet curtains drift carols sounding eerily of angel voices. Excitement builds. After the final carol, Santa Claus bursts through the door with candy and oranges for every child, in string stockings that turn fingers and faces red. He will return on Christmas Eve for a last dashing appearance high above the street on the Courthouse roof, spotlighted with his reindeer while helpers hand out gifts on the marble steps below. Stars shine in the clear, dark air.

At Grandma's house, the Christmas table was twenty feet long and covered with lace from kitchen door, through dining room, through heavy sliding doors opened to living room, all the way to the bay windows overlooking the front lawns. Big girls giggled in the sunroom, waiting for certain phone calls. Big uncles and Grandpa giggled, in trouble with Grandma because the brandy had disappeared.

The year we sprayed the tree white for a sophisticated city kind of Christmas, it smelled all season of paint instead of pine. We had to burn juniper berries to get the proper atmosphere.

Tomorrow we'll take a picnic to the desert. Christmas Day is almost always soft and sunny here in the Valley. Or we could take skis and sleds and go to the snow. Turkey sandwiches, I think, with mayonnaise and slices of cornbread dressing and cranberry sauce to go inside. Hot jugs of chocolate if we go to the snow, and some brandy to add for the grown-ups.

We came home from college one year and found Dad decorating the tree. We had never known he wanted to do that. A man of his stern dignity! There were mixed feelings.

On the ranch, we nipped from bed to shiver beside the wood stove, trying to dress under our nighties. The clear morning air was frosted with mist from the warm breath of cattle, sweet with sage and tang of tule marsh, and sometimes fractured by the thunderous announcement of the last Canadian geese going south. When we came to town, the streets smelled of sunshine and popcorn balls, and were dappled with children like bright winter birds, spilling from house to house, to share.

It is nicer in town, with the warm carpets and the smell of spiced cider, roasting pinenuts and cranberries boiling over on the wood stove.

The year we lost Jimmy, we went to Mammoth with his parents to ski and ignore Christmas, but it followed us. All the bright people chattering and clashing skis in and out of the chalet couldn't hold back the ambience of stored memories. The warmth of firelight, the crackle of wrapping paper, the whisper of voices from the past, carols in the heart. The very pine trees in the sparkling snow sang to us of nearly two thousand years of celebration. There was no escape.

The first Christmas without Mama was very hard. "How Mama would have loved . . .'" we said over and over, from the agony of our hearts. How Mama loved! Christmas was her finest hour - a readymade excuse for pouring her all into the gifts she produced in the long, late hours of night. Carrot cakes, mincemeat and brandied hard sauce for the pies, real plum puddings, spiced peaches, minted pears, knitted, crocheted and hand-sewn adornments, delicately painted pictures and decorations, hundreds of cards with individual notes, a lacey dress for a first dance. Mom's life was expanded in dimension, if not in time, by her boundless love.

It is almost time for the green dawn wind, and the sun will slide incarnadine down the Sierra to gild the frosted fields. Before it comes in the first windows, the children will be down. Little girls with shining eyes and hair, warm as baby rabbits in soft robes, slipping down beside the tree to admire and speculate. Little boys with big grins and voices, trying very hard to control threatening knees and elbows. My hour is ending. The church bells will be ringing. For a mystical time I have touched the hands of all those men and women before me, and they have assured me that we've added a share to the lay-away plan. I don't understand, but I am content to let it remain a mystery. My gift from Him? Courage, I hope, and this one moment of distilled time.

Sing to me of country Christmas.
Joyous sounds are all I want to hear.
Please don't speak of mourning doves
and great, gray whales,
and agonies of losing love.
Let's have cymbals, drums, and ringing
bells,
a pool of peaceful sun between the
snow filled hills,
laughter, fires, schussing skis,
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juniper, tamarack, shining eyes,
and candles on His alter, in small
return for lives.

EVENTS

MOJAVE

Many local events planned. Call (805) 824-2481 for details.

TEHACHAPI

December 3rd. — Santa Claus at the Downtown Mall and in Old Town.

December 9th. — Chamber of Commerce Gourmet Dinner, formal attire. Contact Chamber for further information. (805) 822-4180.

RIDGECREST

December 5th and 6th — Arts and Crafts Show. Desert Empire Fairgrounds, 10 a.m. until 5 p.m.

December 5th. — Chamber of Commerce Christmas Parade.

CALIFORNIA CITY

December 16th — High Desert Christmas in California City at Lake Shore Inn.

DEATH VALLEY

December 24th — Annual Pinata Party for children 10 years of age and under at Furnace Creek Ranch. Farolitos (Little lanterns made of brown paper bags, half filled with sand, with a candle inside will illuminate the garden walks and walls. This is an old Mexican custom to guide the Christ Child to each home. Candles will be lit at dusk. (If you've never had the opportunity to see this — see it now. It's a beautiful custom.) Santa will arrive at the Ranch at 7:00 p.m. Church services will be held at the Visitor's Center.

December 25th — Traditional Christmas dinner will be served at Furnace Creek Inn and Furnace Creek Ranch.

December 31st — New Years Eve parties at both the Furnace Creek Inn and Ranch. The Inn requires reservations, the Ranch does not.

Movies and Bingo throughout the Holidays!

BISHOP

December 5th — Chamber of Commerce Christmas Parade. Downtown Bishop.

December 5th — Arts and Crafts Fair held at the Masonic Hall on East Line Street.

December 8th thru 31st — Photography Exhibit featuring the works of: Tabeth Ligtner, Joshua Crabtree, Valerie J. Naso, James Wilson, and James Stimson. Happy Dragon Fine Arts Annex on West Line Street. Don't miss the exhibit — you'll enjoy it! Call (714) 873-5920 for details.

MAMMOTH LAKES

Mammoth Mountain open for skiing. Lots of fantastic snow!

JUNE LAKE

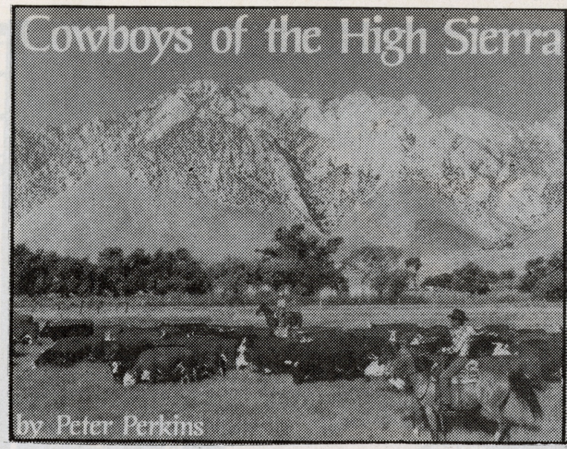
June Mountain open for skiing.

TONOPAH

December 5th — Elks Charity Ball.

CARSON CITY

December 5th — Fantastic Christmas Bazaar at the Silver City Mall. All items hand-made by local clubs and organizations.



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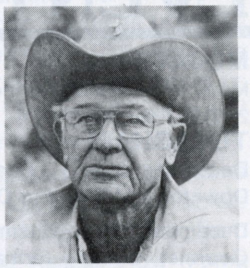


by

Blake Jones

There is year-round fishing on the Owens River between Crowley Lake Dam in the north and Tinnemaha Dam in the south. Forty miles of excellent trout fishing can be found between these two points, with easy access to the river in most areas.

Brown and Rainbow trout are abundant in the river. The limit is five fish until the regular state season, and then the limit goes to ten trout per day. Both Pleasant Valley Reservoir and the Owens River are stocked with good-size trout by the Calif. Fish and Game Department.

I have fished the Owens River in many places through the years. My favorite baits for Brown trout are night crawlers and brown worms. Rainbow trout like Red Eggs best, but don't ever be without the good old garden worms.

My preferred lures are Panther Martins with bucktails of any color, or gold and silver 1/4 ounce Phoebies. Use the silver color lures early in the morning and gold through the middle of the day.

If you are a fly fisherman, the Owens River is an excellent place to challenge your skill. I suggest using California Grey Mosquito, Captain's Black Gnat, Ginger Quill and size 12 and 14 flies. Or try your own favorites. The more willow you can play around the more fun you will have fishing.

When fishing the Owens River south of Pleasant Valley Dam watch for signs that designate spawning areas with a two fish limit.

There is also fair hunting near the river where rabbit and quail can be taken. The plentiful back-water areas are favorite feeding areas for Mallards, offering an alternative to fishermen who have caught their limit.

Always close gates behind you to show your appreciation for being allowed to hunt and fish where cattle are grazing.

Have a good Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

SIERRA KITCHEN

TONOPAH LIGHTNING CASSEROLE

Valerie J. Naso

1 lb. ground sirloin
1 yellow onion, chopped fine
1 bag wide egg noodles, cooked and drained
1 or 2 boxes frozen peas
12 sliced fresh mushrooms (or canned)
2 cups (approximate) tomato sauce, either homemade or canned. (Ragu Spaghetti Sauce is good)
2 Tbs. olive oil

Heat olive oil in large skillet. Add onion and cook for 2 or 3 minutes. Add ground sirloin and season with freshly ground black pepper and a little salt. Cook until sirloin is browned. Drain and set aside. Cook noodles in boiling water with butter and salt. Drain noodles well. Mix together in a 2 1/2 quart casserole dish and season with any of the following:

San Francisco Seasoning (a lot)
Sweet Basil (a gob)
Italian Seasoning (a couple of pinches)
Cayenne Pepper (3 or 4 dashes, or as much as you can stand)

Bake uncovered in a 375 degree oven for 45 minutes. Remove and top with 1 cup (more, you cheese freaks) grated Mozzarella cheese. Return to oven for 15 minutes until cheese melts. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese, if desired.

This dish has been served to many a miner, also butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. It can be doubled, subtracted from or added to without any disastrous effects. There is nothing anyone can do to spoil this casserole. If no one comes home, it can be cooked for two hours. If everyone comes home, add whatever you have left over from the refrigerator. This casserole is the great absorber; there are ten thousand variations and all of them quite good.

TOFU CHEESECAKE

2 eggs
1/3 cup honey
1 cup cottage cheese
1/2 pound tofu
1/2 tsp. vanilla
3 Tbls. wheat germ or whole wheat wheat flour
3/4 cup milk

Add ingredients to blender one at a time. Use short bursts of power while adding parts of the milk at each step to help liquefy. Pour mixture into graham cracker crust (10 inch). Bake at 325 degrees for one hour to an hour and 15 minutes. Chill and serve. Fresh fruit may be added on top for a real treat!

GRAHAM CRACKER CRUST

1/2 cup Mi-Dell Graham Crumbs
1/4 cup raw wheat germ
1/2 cup whole wheat flour
2 Tbls. brown sugar (optional)
1/4 cup soft butter

Cut butter into other ingredients until crumbly. Press into a 10 inch pie pan.

SURPRISE DIP

Valerie J. Naso

3 ozs. cream cheese, beaten to a fluff
1 can crushed pineapple in syrup
crushed Macadamia nuts
Chopped stem ginger in syrup

Combine all ingredients and chill overnight. A little brandy never hurt.

CHRISTMAS EGGNOG

12 eggs, separated
1 qt. bourbon
6 oz. dark rum
2 cups sugar
2 qts. milk
1 pt. whipping cream, whipped
Cinnamon
Freshly grated nutmeg

Beat egg yolks until light yellow; add bourbon and rum gradually, beating constantly. Add sugar and milk. Fold in whipped cream and stiffly beaten egg whites. Sprinkle with cinnamon and nutmeg.

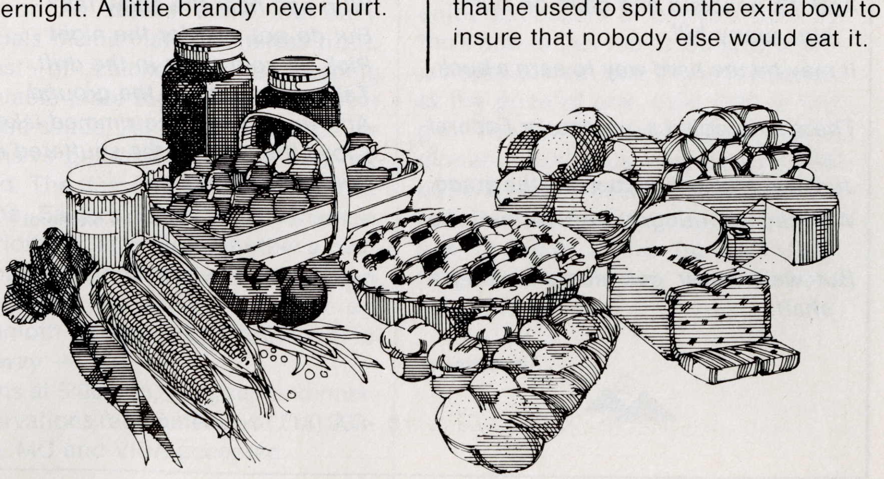
GARDNER BREAD PUDDING

Valerie J. Naso

1 quart milk
2 thin slices bread, broken in pieces
2 eggs, slightly beaten
1 cup sugar
1 cup seeded raisins
vanilla to taste
1 to 2 tsps. cinnamon

Mix together and pour into buttered 2 1/2 quart casserole dish. Bake 40 minutes at 425 degrees until it boils up. Stir. Cook at 350 degrees for 3 hours, stirring often. Serve with cream or hard sauce.

This recipe was Earl Stanley Gardner's favorite dessert. I'm not sure if he would have killed for it, but it is a fact that he used to spit on the extra bowl to insure that nobody else would eat it.



Aim Morhardt relaxing with his music in the country that he loves.
Photo by Genevieve Morhardt

AIM MORHARDT . . .

An artist, composer, poet and prospector.

by Valerie J. Naso

Aim Morhardt has done more things than most people could do in three lifetimes. For instance, he was Zane Grey's personal photographer for eight years, a job that took him to Australia. He ended up in Sydney and was head of the still department and assistant director at Cinesound studios. His movie career crossed to Hollywood where he worked as a film editor, but when the studio closed for a month he took a job as music teacher for the Bishop Union High School. This began a love affair with the High Sierra that has lasted more than forty years.

During this time he has taught every instrument, formed a county-wide symphony orchestra and played cello in his string quartet. He is a master watercolot artist, a composer, poet and prospector. Oh, he has also taught Russian Ballet, and skiing, been president of the Death Valley 49ers, had five books published and has shown his paintings widely. But what it all means to him is doing something well and sharing what he has to say about life and the beauty of the country.

Aim makes his home with his talented wife Genevieve.

NEW HOPE

The road is bad but we will fix it,
It needs some cold mix and we will mix it.
The ore is low-grade but we can screen,
Take out the rich and leave the lean.
We need a compresser up there, too,
Who has the money, me or you?
It'll be hard work to make a dime
But it's ours so we don't mind the time.
We can start when we want and stop when we please,
We can lean on our picks and shoot the breeze.
We don't have to kowtow to anyone's will,
And it's peaceful and calm on our big, sunny hill.
It may be the hard way to earn a buck,

There's no politics, unions, or Federal aid,
Just two men trying to make the grade.
We may go hungry, and we may be daft,
But we'll never get ulcers sinking a shaft.

. . . Aim Morhardt

MINING AT ELEVEN THOUSAND

Let the first snows pass.
They will be feathery, light,
Drifting, swirling into the crevasses of rock,
Gone with an October day,
Index only of departing deer
And the early shadows.
You will know the sign of danger,
The clouds descending gently,
Silently blotting out the peaks,
The lodgepole pines, the sky;
Big flakes drifting
Against surprised eyelids.

It will be quiet in the night.
Who can hear the snow fall?
But do not wait for the night . . .
Pick up your tools in the drift,
Take a last look at the ground
And the sunken, ice-rimmed lake,
Close the door to the shuttered mill
Winter has come.

. . . Aim Morhardt

PHILOSOPHY

I do not covet any man his gold,
His medals or the laurel wreath of fame,
I spend no time in yearning after the power,
The grave's too close to play that kind of game.
No, I would rather watch a stormy sunrise
Over Sierra crest in mauve and rose
Than meet a queen in some far regal palace;
Each to his own enchanted future goes.
Mine the unending wealth that nature brings
Here by my door as seasons come and go;
Rocks, trees and clouds are of my grand design,
Gold autumn leaves and drifts of winter snow.
That which I have to say has little worth,
All that I leave will vanish in a dawn,
Careless I squander time, my only coin,
Too soon the journey's up, and I'll be gone.

. . . Aim Morhardt

HIGH ALTITUDE DINING

BISHOP

SIERRA EMBERS — Visitors and locals alike choose Sierra Embers when looking for great food and fantastic atmosphere. Special Christmas menu includes: Roast Goose with all the trimmings, Prime Rib or Beef, Top Sirloin for two, Stuffed Shrimp, Chicken Kiev, Honey Glazed Ham, New York Pepper Roast—all dinners include soup, fruit salad, choice of potatoes or rice pilaf and dessert.

Banquet facilities for 15 to 130 people are also available. Sunday brunch is served from 10-1 p.m. Dinner is served 5:30-9:00 p.m. everynight. Located at 970 N. Main St. Bishop (714)873-4775

COPPER KETTLE — A favorite of locals and visitors, the warm atmosphere of the Copper Kettle offers fine family dining for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Open 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Located on Main Street/Bishop next to Whiskey Creek.

WHISKEY CREEK — A delightful dining experience, featuring a new selection on the menu of fresh fish daily. Dinner from 5:30-10:00 Reservations suggested (714) 873-7174. The cocktail lounge is open from 4:30 P.M. - 2 a.m. weekdays and 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. weekends. Master Card, VISA and American Express accepted.

MAMMOTH LAKES

ROGET'S — Offers a different and innovative cuisine, complimented by a varied selection of fine wines. Light sauces enhance dishes of veal, prawns, scallops, and lamb. Steak lovers will enjoy the mustard and pepper steaks, while vegetable devotees will delight in our vegetable almandine. Cocktails served. Corner of Main Street and Minaret Rd./Mammoth Lakes, CA/(714) 934-4466.
Reservations appreciated.

WHISKEY CREEK — Mammoth's perennial "in spot" has been completely redecorated and added a new Oyster bar upstairs, featuring seafood Florintine, oysters, delicious clam chowder and other delights. The restaurant offers the same excellent quality Whiskey Creek is renowned for plus some new entrees on the menu including fresh fish daily. Children's portions of several entrees are available. The extensive wine list features California's special vitners and the selection compliments any dinner. The lounge upstairs offers a full bar and entertainment nightly. Reservations suggested (714) 934-2555. Located at the intersection of Highway 203 and Minaret Rd. Open 5:30-10 p.m. Sun thru Thurs. and 5-11 p.m. Fri. and Sat. The Oyster bar is open until 11 p.m.

SHOGUN — Mammoth's only Japanese Restaurant, is hailed by locals and visitors as being a deliciously authentic restaurant. Entree's include Tempura, Beef or Chicken Sukiyaki or Teriyaki with miso soup, steamed rice and green tea. All dishes are prepared from scratch to bring you the freshest and finest in Japanese cooking. Skewered appetizers are accompanied by hot or cool sake, wine or imported Japanese beers. Located in the Mammoth Mini Mall on Laurel Mountain Rd. behind the Safeway center. Open 7 days 5:00 p.m. Reservations recommended (714) 934-3970. MC and VISA accepted.

THE MOGUL STEAKHOUSE — Owner/host Dan Haydon has added a full bar to accomodate the winter crowds. Prices are reasonable and the atmosphere relaxed and friendly. Steaks are the main bill of fare, cooked by the best chef in the world , you! In addition to steaks there are daily specials of marinated boneless trout, breast of chicken or a heaping vegetable plate topped with butter or cheese sauce. All entree's include an extensive gourmet salad bar and hot bread. The desserts are VERY famous in the Eastern Sierra — Cinnamon Charlotte, (Dan's Grandmother's own recipe), Gingerbread with hot lemon sauce and ice cream. Located on Mammoth Tavern Rd. directly behind Safeway —
Opens at 5:00 p.m. 7 nights for dinner. Reservations recommended (714) 934-3039. MC and VISA accepted.

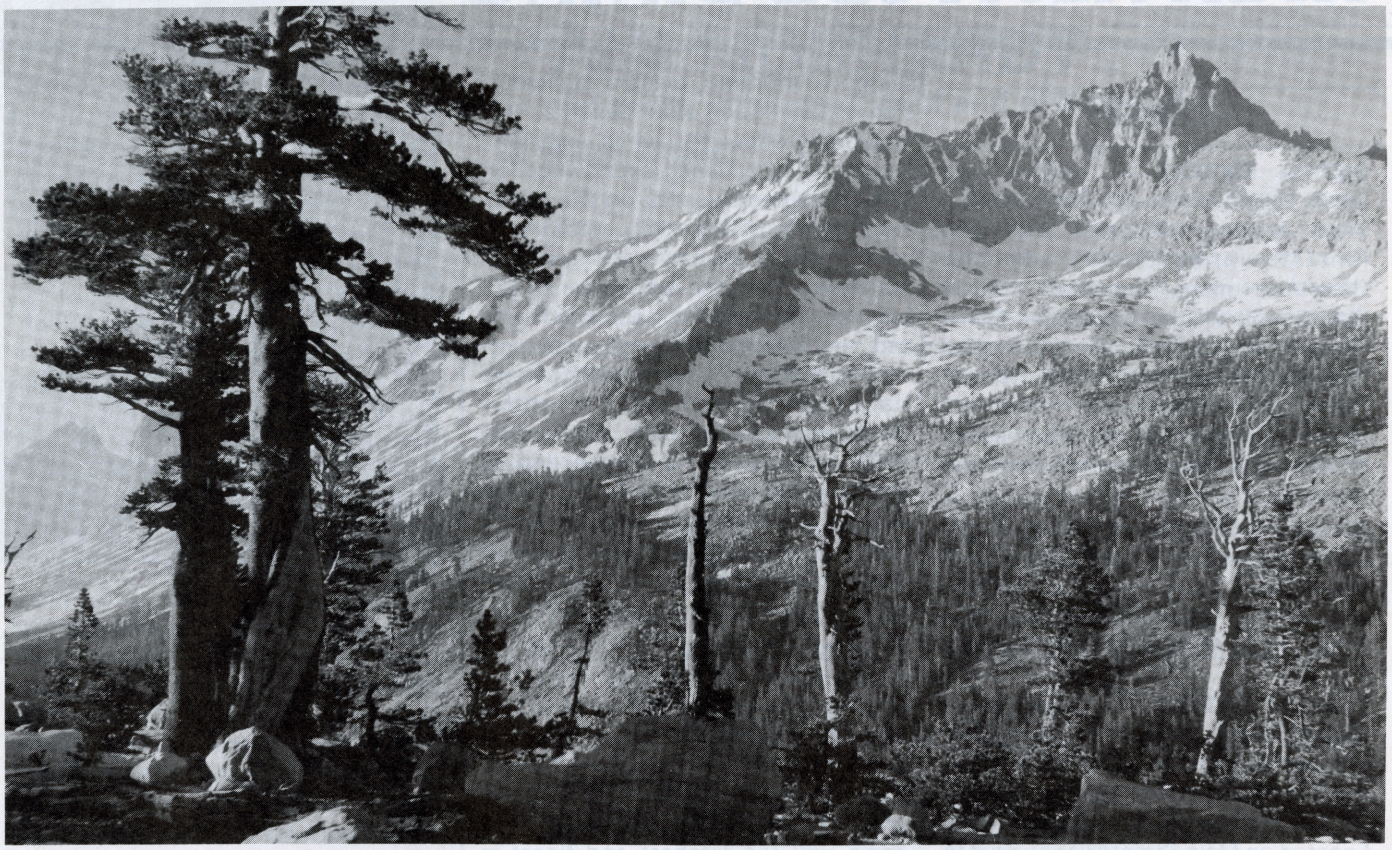
IN THE ASPENS — This charming restaurant, a landmark in the Hilton Creek-Crowley Lake area, is a special place to relax and enjoy lunch or dinner away from the hustle of Mammoth. The menu offers Deli sandwiches, burgers, french dip, steaks, chicken, Mexican dishes, vegetable plates and fantastic onion rings and zucchini chips! Beer and wine available. Try some of the homemade desserts for your sweet tooth. Take Crowley Lake turn off and go to Crowley Lake Drive (Old 395) in Crowley Lake, CA./(714) 935-4620.

THE NORMANDY INN — Newly redecorated for more intimate dining, this popular French dinner house is 2 miles south of the Mammoth-June Lake airport, from Highway 395 turn off at Crowley Lake Drive. Owners John and Suzanne Olson and their family greet you with genuinely warm and friendly service. The menu boasts excellent french cuisine and appetizers. Desserts du jour are a gourmets delight. The intimate full bar offers a warm winter fire in the stone fireplace with windows overlooking Crowley Lake. Select wine list. Open 7 days a week at 5 p.m. Reservations suggested (714) 935-4406. MC and VISA accepted.

McGEE CREEK INN — A landmark built in 1929 by Senator Keough, McGee Creek Inn still maintains the charm and rustic atmosphere of the Sierra, where you can enjoy breakfast, lunch or dinner. A huge stone fireplace graces the dining room where you can enjoy appetizers or entree's from the Inn's new dinner menu. Sunday dinner is a special treat with Prime Rib for two at the price of one, from 5:30 to 9:00 p.m. The bar is a perfect place for after dinner drinks or just relaxing with a hot buttered rum. The bar opens daily at 11 a.m. Breakfast and lunch served from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dinner from 5:30-9:00. Closed Wednesday. Reservations (714) 935-4514.

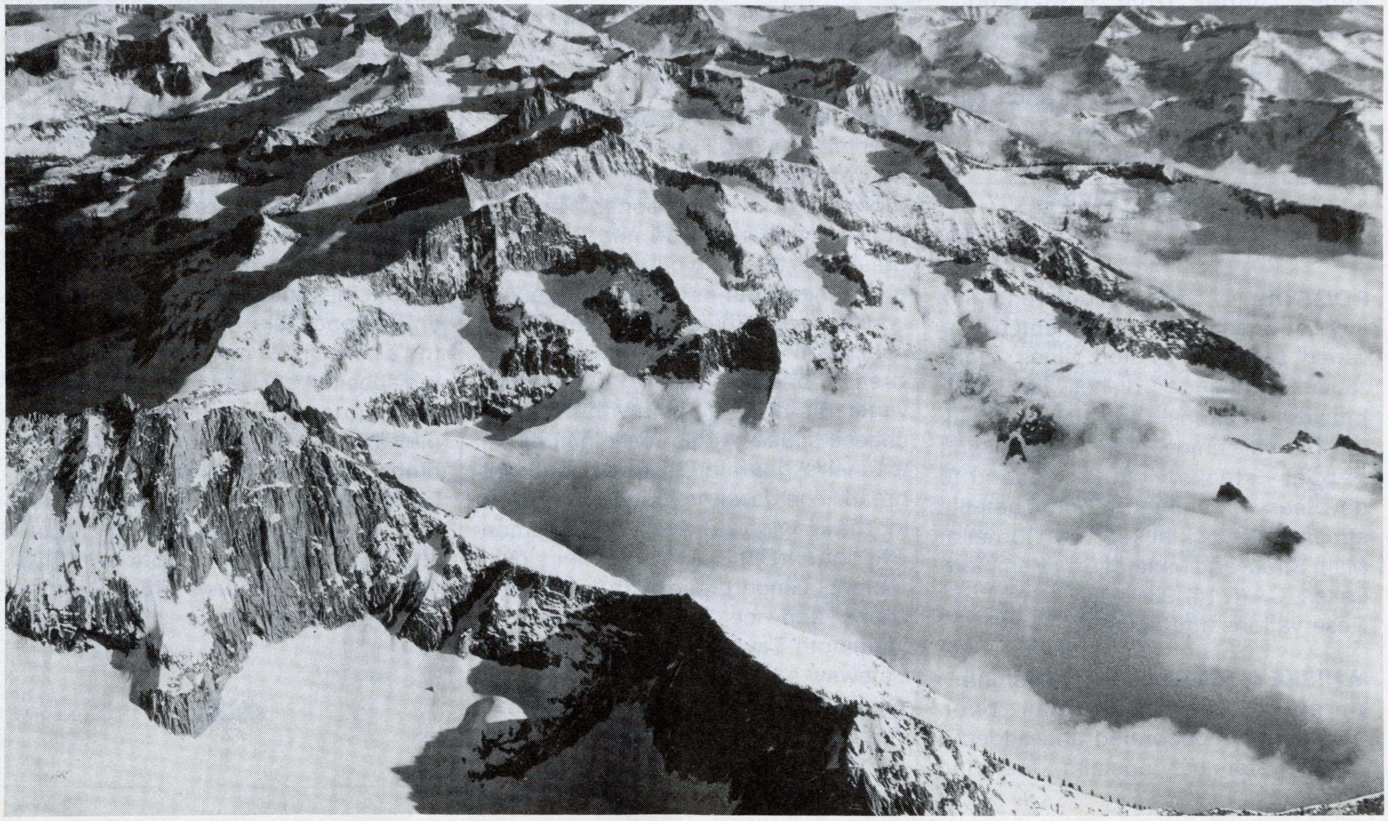
SEQUOIA

(Story begins on page 56)



Black Kaweah (elevation, 13,765) at camp above the Kern River near sunset. Tom Ross Photo

Aerial view of Mt. Stewart in the foreground (elevation 12,205). Eagle Scout Pk. at left center (elevation 12,040). Photo by Tom Ross



Mt. Corcoran, center background (elevation 13,760). Owens Valley is visible in the far background, upper right. The mountains in the foreground are within the Sequoia National Park, including the west face of Mt. Corcoran. Photo by Tom Ross

This photo was taken from the summit of Mt. Eisen (elevation 12,160) looking south. Photo by Tom Ross

The giants humble all who visit,
and remind us that the acheivements of
humankind pale in comparison to the graceful
miracle of the sequoia.
Photography by Patty Van Dolson

SEQUOIA

THE GENTLE GIANT

by Gregory N. Leiber

"When I entered this sublime wilderness the day was nearly done, the trees with rosy, glowing countenances seemed to be hushed and thoughtful, as if waiting in conscious religious dependence on the sun, and one naturally walked softly and awestricken among them. I wandered on, meeting nobler trees where all are noble, subdued in the general calm, as if in some vast hall pervaded by the deepest sanctities and solemnities that sway human souls."

John Muir wrote these words about his first encounter with the mystical giant sequoia in the grove he would christen the Giant Forest. It is natural to speak of the sequoia in spiritual terms, for the groves are truly nature's great cathedrals, places to worship the beauty to be found on this earth. The giants humble all who visit, and remind us that the achievements of humankind pale in comparison to the graceful miracle of the sequoia.

Muir was not the first white person to visit the land of the Big Trees. That distinction belongs to Hale Tharp, an early settler of the Tulare region. Tharp was the first to settle in the Three Rivers area, 27 miles east of present-day Visalia. He explored the Sierra foothills extensively, and became friendly with the Kaweah subtribe of the Yokut Indians. In 1858, Chief Chappo rewarded Tharp's proven integrity by guiding him up Indian Trail under Morro Rock into the Giant Forest. Later that year, J.H. Johnson was led by an Indian to King's Canyon.

Tharp later guided a trapper named James Wolverton to the Giant Forest, and the two men spent many winters in the area. It was Wolverton who discovered and named the General Sherman Tree after his commanding officer in the Civil War. It is the largest of all the sequoia.

In 1879 John Muir spent time with Tharp and explored the region on his own. It was during this trip that he named the Giant Forest.

It is ironic that people were the greatest threat to the sequoia. During the 1870's, grazing of sheep and cattle threatened the mountain watersheds. At the same time, logging began in the Sierran forests. A sawmill was operating in the vicinity of the General Grant Grove as early as 1864.

Citizens of the San Joaquin Valley became aware of the threat to the watersheds that provided water for their farms. George Stewart of Visalia led a public campaign to preserve the forests, and in 1890 Congress established Sequoia and General Grant Parks.

In 1926 Sequoia doubled in size, including the Kern Canyon and Mount Whitney. In 1940, General Grant Park became a part of the

Continued on Page 58

SEQUOIA Continued

newly created King's Canyon National Park.

Extensive logging throughout the state in the 1880's and 90's descimated the stands of giant sequoia. One can appreciate the extent of the original forests by visiting Big Stump Basin on Highway 180, about 3 miles from General Grant Village. The entire basin is dotted with huge stumps and logs, the sad remains of a tranquil sequoia forest. It is here that we can view the Mark Twain Stump, all that is left of a sequoia that was comparable in size to the General Sherman Tree. This particular basin containing thousands of the most ancient sequoia was logged in a few short months prior to the creation of Sequoia and General Grant Parks.

The remaining protected sequoia are the last surviving members of a group of trees that grew across the planet over 100 million years ago. Other living descendants of this family include the coast redwood and the Japanese cedar. Fossil evidence has shown that the giant sequoia once grew in Australia, Greenland, Antartica and throughout western North America. Today the sequoia are native only to the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. The northernmost grove is located in Placer County, and the southernmost is in Tulare County.

The sequoia are the largest living things on earth. The General Sherman Tree, located in the Giant Forest, is estimated to weigh 1,385 tons and is as tall as a 16 story building. There are trees that grow taller or with a greater possible diameter of trunk, but none equal the sequoia for sheer size and majesty.

While modern coring devices used to date living trees will not reach the heart of the largest sequoia, the trees are known to be among the oldest living things yet discovered. The age of the General Sherman Tree has been estimated to be 2,200 years; the oldest sequioa on record was over 3,200 years old. Only the ancient bristlecone pines have longer lifespans.

The sequoia owe their longevity in part to the protective bark that encases each tree. An average of 6" thick, bark on some of the larger sequoia has been measured at over two feet thick.

The bark is essential to their survival since fire is an integral part of the sequoia reproductive cycle. The bark has little resin to fuel flames, and it also insulates the tree from intense heat. Sequoia do not sprout like their cousins the coast redwood - seeds are the sole source of a new generation of

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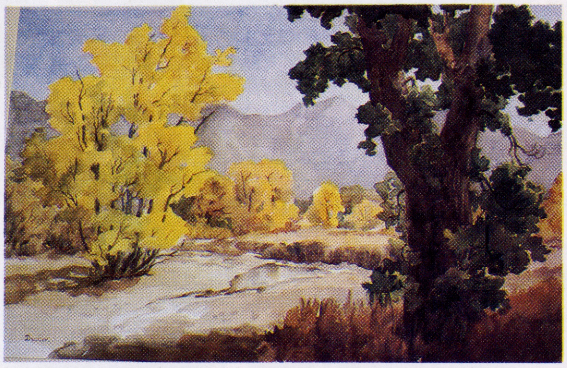

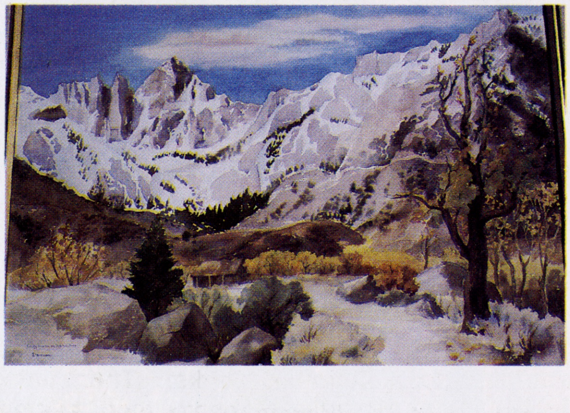

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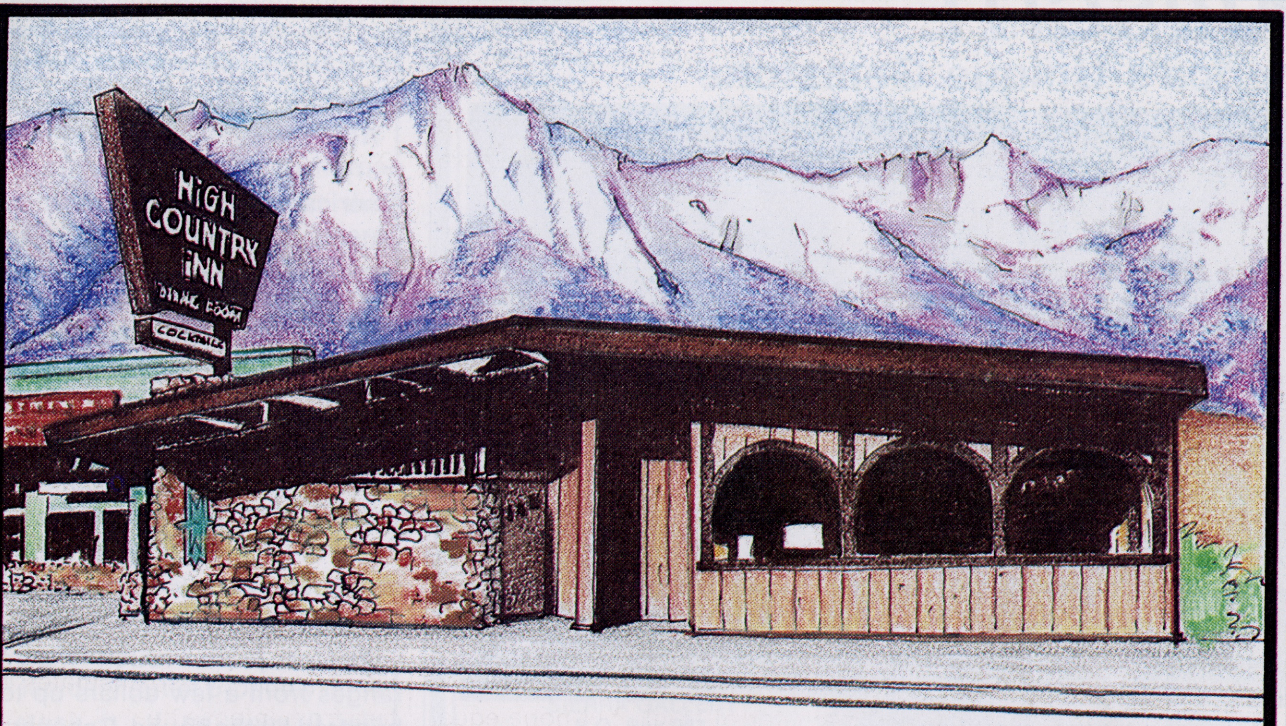

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SEQUOIA Continued

trees. Mature sequoia will produce up to a half million seeds a year. Green, closed sequoia cones can remain on the trees for 20 years or more. A fire occuring in the forest undergrowth causes the cones to dry and the seeds fall on competitor-free ground. This gives the sequoia seedlings a better chance to grow among the giant parent trees.

The sequoia are also involved in symbiotic relationships with two very unlikely forest denizens. The Douglas squirrel (also known as a chickaree) feeds on the green sequoia cones. Since it does not hibernate, the chickaree buries thousands of the cones beneath the large trees. The seeds that are not retrieved by the squirrel can eventually sprout and produce seedlings.

A very small cone-boring beetle also plays a part in the life-cycle of the giant sequoia. The larvae of the beetle bore into the inner tissue of the cones, causing the cones to dry out. The seeds are then released to fall to the ground, increasing further the chances of the sequoia to survive. It is a significant example of the interdependence of the smallest and largest elements of nature.

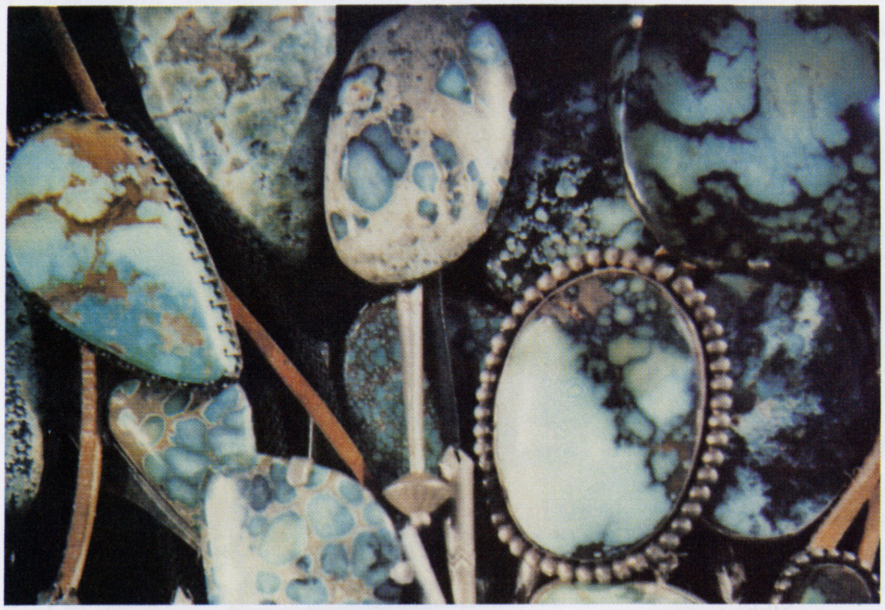
In the end, it is rarely disease that kills a giant sequoia. The root systems of the trees are extensive, but relatively shallow and without a deep taproot. A large sequoia will usually live until it is toppled in a violent storm, its death an earth shaking climax to a long existence.

Sequoia and King's Canyon are accessible by car only from the west, via Fresno, Visalia, and Bakersfield. No roads cross the east-west width of the parks. Public transportation serves the parks from Fresno during the summer. There are over eight hundred miles of hiking trails for back-packing and dayhikes. In the winter you can snowshoe or try downhill and crosscountry skiing. Some of the finest trout fishing streams in California are found in the parks.

The three main sequoia stands are Cedar Grove, Grant Grove, and the Giant Forest. The road to Cedar Grove in King's Canyon is closed during the winter, as is the General's Highway, the road connecting the two parks. Grant Grove and the Giant Forest are usually accessible in winter. For information about the parks call or write Sequoia and King's Canyon National Parks, Three Rivers, California 93271 (209) 565-3341.

VARISCITE

America's Unique Gemstone



Polished Variscite from the author's collection.
Photographed by Valerie J. Naso

by J.E. "Aim" Morhardt

Over the last few years there has been a marked increase in the number of people cutting and setting gems, both as a hobby and as a part-time business. As the retired population grows so does all the field of Arts and Crafts, and among lapidary enthusiasts there is a constant search for new and different materials. Craftsmen eventually tire of the "trade blue" of all too often treated Turquoise; every type of agate has gone the rounds, excepting perhaps sagenite which is extremely rare; jade brings a shrug of the shoulders, possibly because there is so much of it, easily accessible, in the lower grades.

This being the case, anything new or different, or merely rediscovered, is sure to arouse interest, especially if the material is rare. Which brings us to Variscite, that green first cousin to Turquoise. Both are hydrous aluminum phosphates, both may be found in the same locality, even the same mine, both share the same genesis and geology. Turquoise is colored by copper, Variscite by iron, although there is probably an isomorphous series between the two, so that in some areas Turquoise is inclined to the green side as in Nevada, probably occasioned by the addition of iron, while Variscite, though seldom blue, may sometimes, under spectrographic analysis show copper as a component. Not enough definitive work has yet been done to thoroughly establish this relationship but that is of little concern to the lapidarist. His interest is first, with beauty, second, with rarity, and thirdly, with price. In all three Variscite cannot be excelled.

This gemstone comes in all shades of grey, pink, yellow, green, brown and black, even sometimes bluish, but not as Turquoise is. It is seldom without matrix and that matrix may in turn be almost any color. In stones without matrix the subtle pattern variations are infinite. You will find, as well, the most delicate of spiderweb and the most complex oolitic structures, (commonly called bird's eyes or fisheggs). There are nodules with concentric patterning and sometimes solid masses of green from the most luscious pale apple to the darkest jade. Color illustrations rarely show their full charm.

As to the rarity of Variscite, it can truly be called the unique American Gem. With a handful of exceptions, nowhere in the world is it mined as a gemstone but in Utah and Nevada. The material is cryptocrystalline in occurance in other places in the world and a little poor cutting material has been found in Australia and Spain, but aside from a few new locations in Eastern California and possibly one in Colorado, all world production comes from Utah and Nevada.

As for price, rough material ranges from a few dollars up to a hundred by the pound. Cabochons retail at thirty cents a caret and up. Unlike Turquoise, where some standards of general desirability have been formally agreed on, ie. at one end of the spectrum dark blue spiderweb and at the other end, greenish in a light matrix or without pattern, no one can guess precisely what the Variscite enthusiast will purchase. Choice is virtually on a stone to stone basis with much agony at having to choose No other gemstone is so varied.

In addition to these three desirable properties, Variscite is the lapidarist's delight for, although no harder than Turquoise and thus as easy to form, it almost always takes a mirror polish with hardly any effort. Matrix Specimens may vary but the generality holds. Any beginner can have fun with Variscite at modest cost. The material tumbles well, attaining a fair polish even with rudimentary equipment and drills as readily as Turquoise. Unlike its blue cousin, veins sometimes run four to six inches in width, allowing the slabbing and cutting of very large stones.

Continued on next page

VARISCITE Continued

Does it have any drawbacks to counter all this? Honestly no. True, if you buy rough you will not know its characteristics until you have polished some, but it is much less variable than Turquoise in this regard. Vein material is more uniform that nodules. You will find that no two mines produce the same material except in the poorer grades. Lucin is as different from Fairfield as Candelaria is from Miller Mt. What looks unimpressive in the rough may work up beautifully and vice versa. The material is forever full of surprises.

Should you wish to experiment with this remarkable gemstone you may find it hard to come by. Your local lapidary outlet probably does not stock it. If he does it will doubtless be in finished cabs. Further than that, he probably won't know where to get a selection. It is the old story of merchandising; 'stock what the public wants', which in some cases is good business . . . but if you can't see it you certainly can't buy it!

And when we say that Variscite is rare we understate the case. To the best of the writer's knowledge there are no more than two dozen actively producing mines and a number of these are only netting a few hundred pounds a month. If Variscite should, of a sudden, strike the public fancy, the current supply would be wiped out overnight.

Unlike Turquoise, there is no Variscite 'chalk'; (soft uncolored or poorly colored gangue that can be variously treated). All Variscite known to the author is of good hardness, and none, to his knowledge is being plasticized or otherwise treated. So, if you buy Variscite you get the real thing the way nature created it, and you invariably get a stone of individual character . . . and if you like green this is for you.

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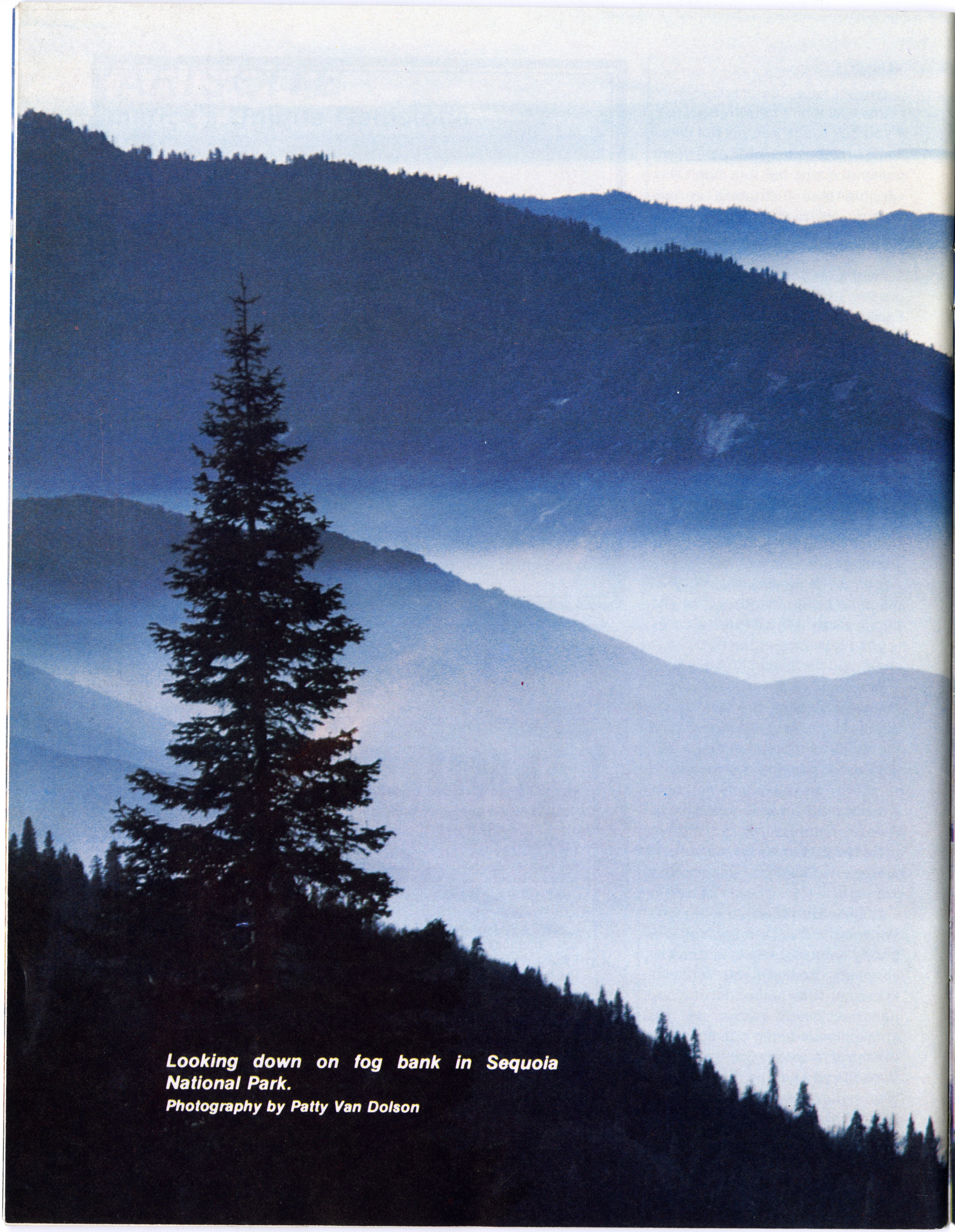
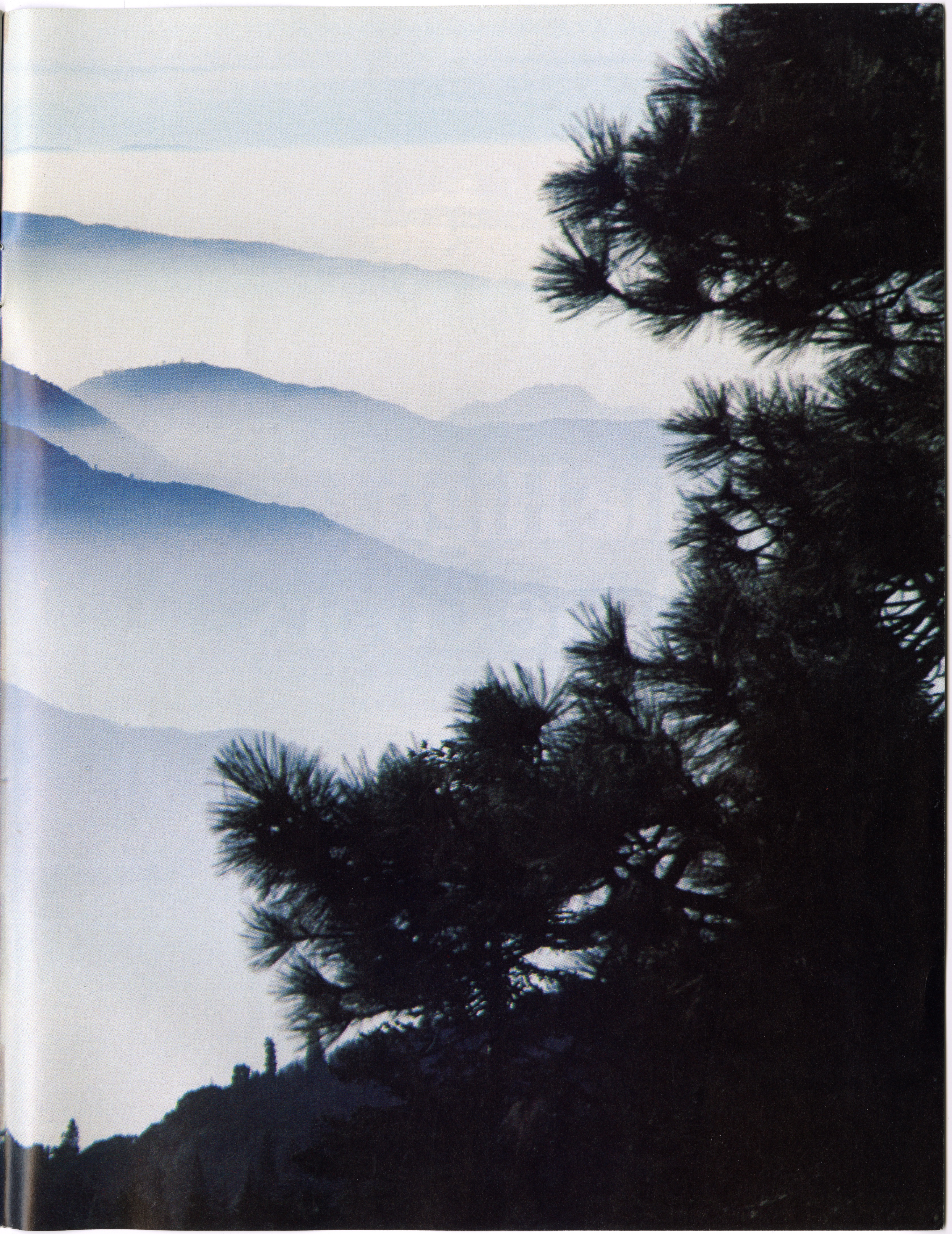
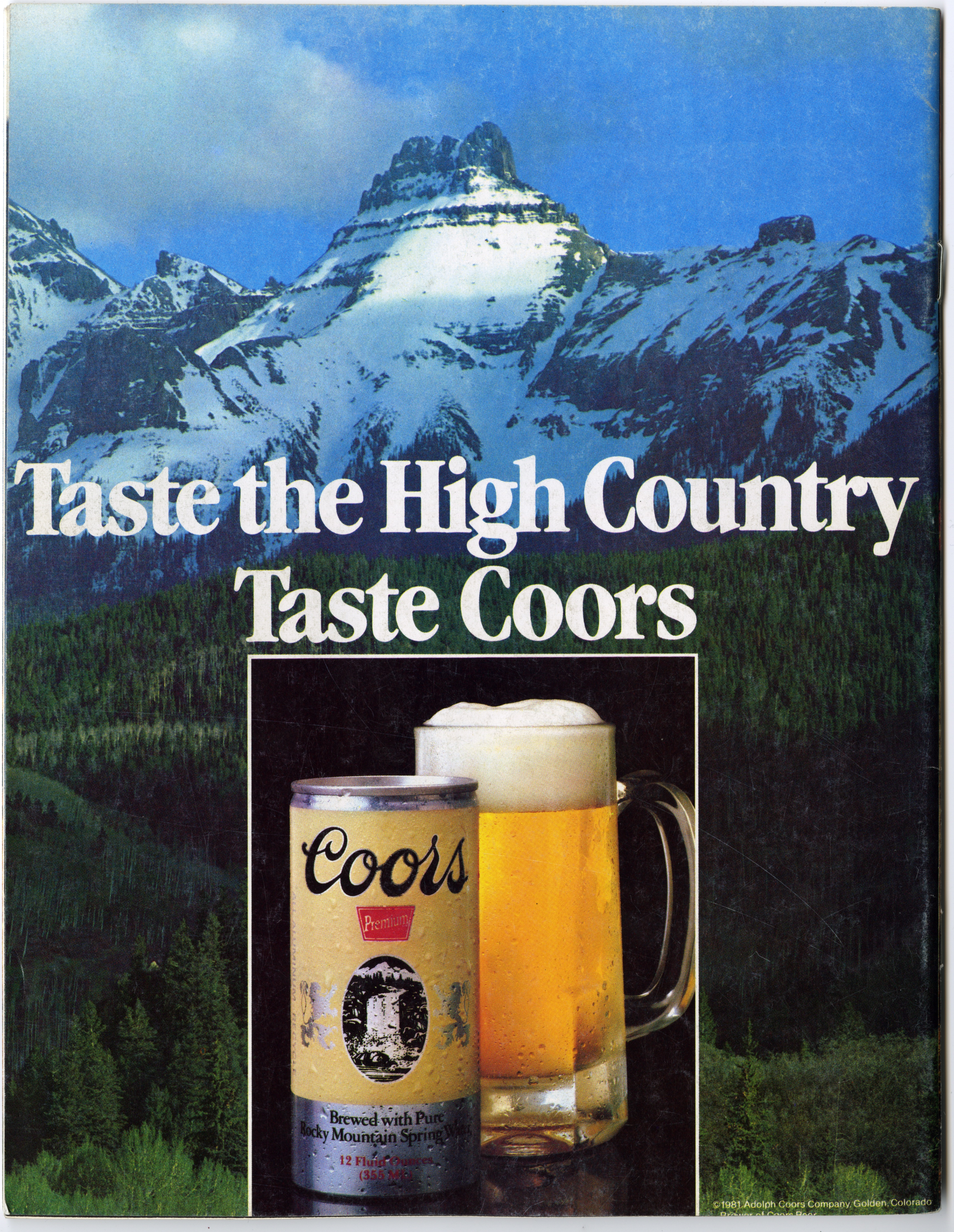


Looking down on fog bank in Sequoia National Park.

Photography by Patty Van Dolson

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